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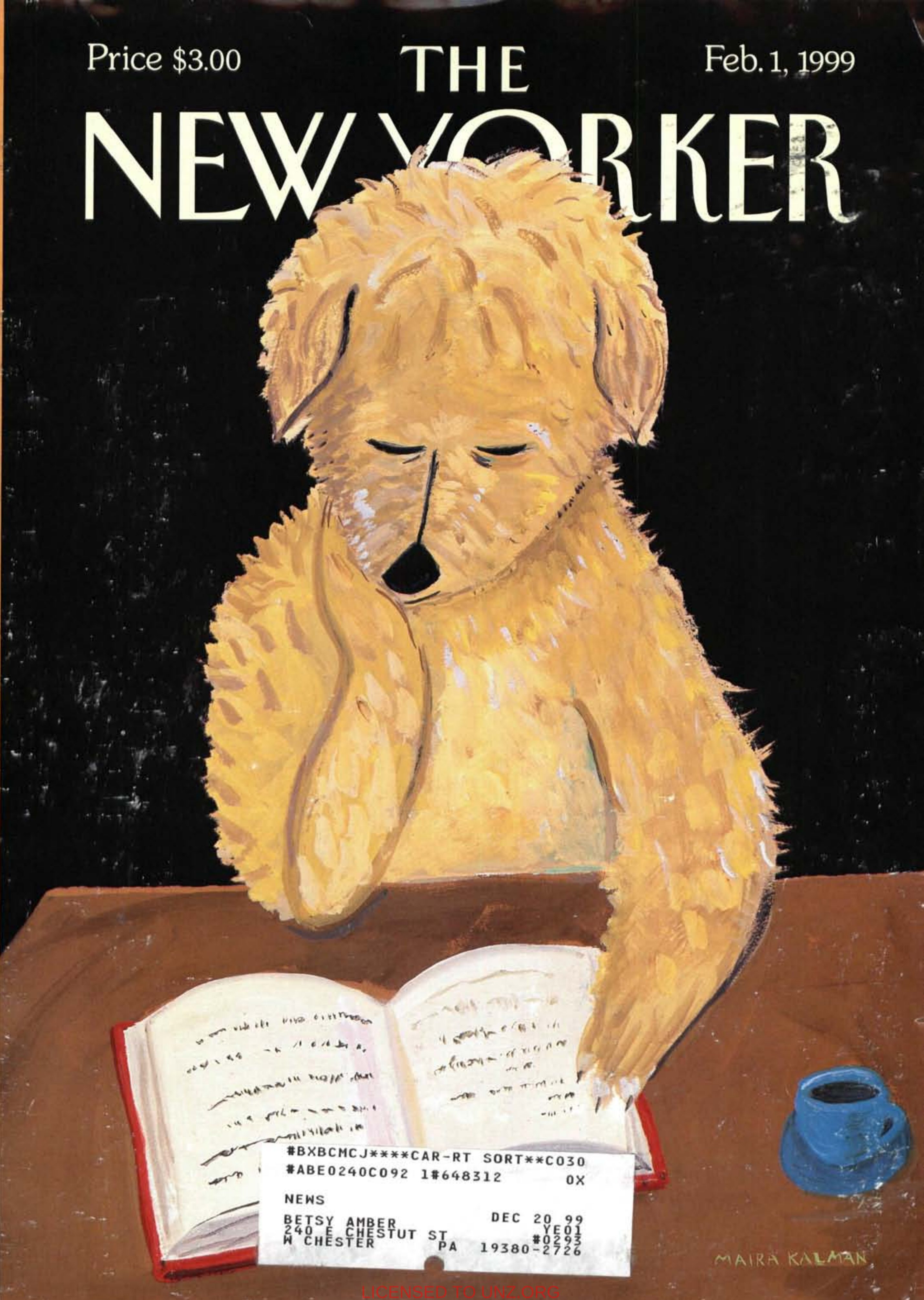

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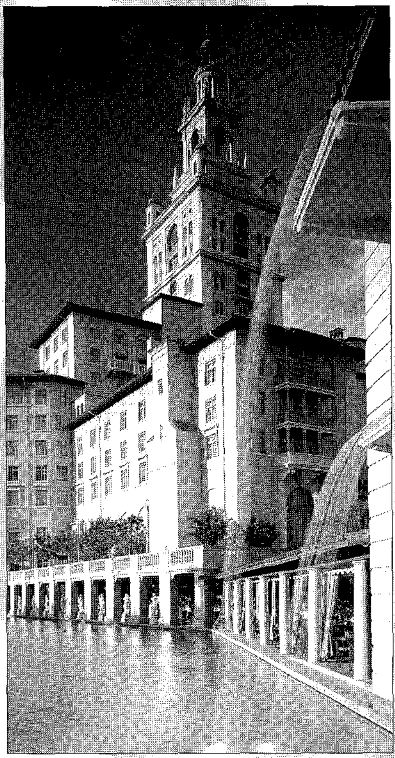

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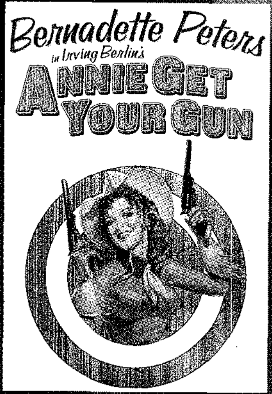

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CONTRIBUTORS

MARK SINGER ("The Friendly Executioner," p. 33) is the author of "Funny Money," "Mr. Personality" (a collection of his *New Yorker* articles), and "Citizen K."

MARCUS LAFFEY ("Inside Dope," p. 29) is the pseudonym of a New York City police officer who writes about law enforcement for the magazine.

REBECCA MEAD (The Talk of the Town, p. 24; "The Crisis in Cashmere," p. 56) is a staff writer for *The New Yorker.*

ATUL GAWANDE ("When Doctors Make Mistakes," p. 40), a staff writer, is a surgical resident and former health-policy adviser in the Clinton Administration.

PAUL GOLDBERGER (The Talk of the Town, p. 23; The Sky Line, p. 70) is the architecture critic for *The New Yorker.* He teaches at Yale University.

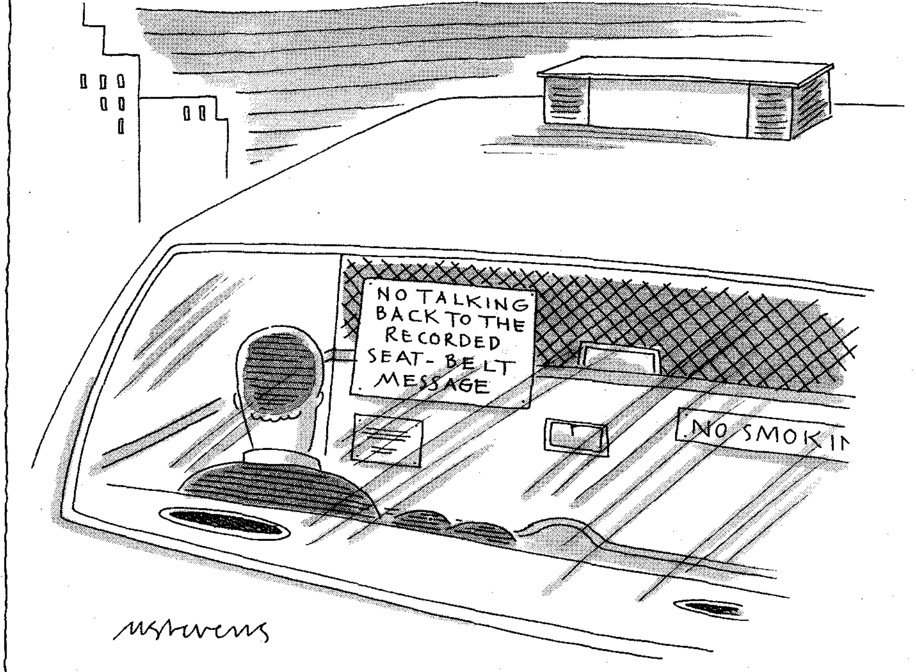
LEONARD MICHAELS (Fiction, p. 64) is a novelist. His books include "The Men's Club," the memoir "Sylvia," and the forthcoming "Time Out of Mind," a selection from his journals.

NANCY FRANKLIN (On Television, p. 80) is a theatre critic for the magazine and writes a regular TV column.

FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY (The Talk of the Town, p. 24) is the author of, most recently, "At Home with the Marquis de Sade."

STEVE BRODNER (Sketchbook, p. 44) is a caricaturist and political illustrator who contributes regularly to the magazine.

BRUCE McCALL (The Back Page, p. 86) is a writer and illustrator. His most recent book is "Thin Ice." ♦


NO TALKING BACK TO THE RECORDED SEAT-BELT MESSAGE
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THE MAIL

PARSING POLLARD

I was recently asked by my teenaged son to explain why Jonathan Pollard should not remain in jail, and I found myself at a loss to articulate the damage his espionage had caused, so I read Seymour M. Hersh's "The Traitor" (January 18th) with anticipation. To my disappointment, however, the article gave me no concrete reason for Pollard's life sentence. Except for enabling the Israelis to bomb Tunisia without advance detection, the danger to the United States from Pollard's espionage seems to be theoretical. Though Hersh describes numerous intelligence capabilities that were compromised, he—and also those who oppose Pollard's release—failed to demonstrate that Pollard's actions resulted in any actual damage to our national security. And more than thirteen years after Pollard's arrest, it seems improbable that any such damage, had it occurred, could not be revealed. Thus, the question of why Pollard merits a life sentence remains.

JAY K. GOLDBERG
New York City

Jonathan Pollard is being punished because he is a scoundrel, not because he is a Jew. This is not late-nineteenth-century France, and Jonathan Pollard is not Alfred Dreyfus. Meanwhile, in Israel, Mordechai Vanunu, who was formerly an employee at Israel's top-secret nuclear facility at Dimona, is serving an eighteen-year sentence for alerting the public, via a London newspaper, that Israel was secretly making nuclear weapons. Vanunu is in jail despite the fact that much of what he revealed was already widely suspected, that his motivation was nuclear disarmament, not money, and that he did not trade off one country for another. Campaigns to secure Vanunu's release have thus far failed, and no one expects Dershowitz & Co. to put pressure on Israel to release him. It is scandalous that some people are trying to reconstruct Pollard as a victim of an overreaching and vindictive United States intelligence community. It is equally scandalous to permit this affair to be used as a bargaining chip in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Jonathan Pollard, after all, is an American citizen in breach of American law.

MARK GUADAGNINO
New York City

Seymour Hersh's article on Jonathan Pollard is certainly damning. However, the efforts of the Jewish community to secure clemency for Pollard have frequently made the point that Pollard elected to take a plea bargain in exchange for the government's agreement not to seek the maximum penalty of life imprisonment, and that the government reneged. Hersh, on the other hand, writes that Pollard "elected to plea bargain rather than face a trial." What was the benefit of not facing a trial if Pollard was exposed to a sentence of life imprisonment? Why would anyone in his right mind enter into a plea bargain that was no bargain for him?

JOSHUA LEVINE
Palm Beach, Fla.

Seymour M. Hersh replies:

The government did not renege. Pollard's plea bargain provided that the government would not ask for any specific sentence—that is, life—and it did not do so. In a hearing, Pollard was asked by Judge Aubrey Robinson, Jr., whether he understood that the plea bargain did not preclude a life sentence, and Pollard said that he did understand. The sentencing decision was made by the judge alone. It should be noted that the National Security Agency spy Ronald Pelton, who was arrested the same year as Pollard and who turned over no documents to his Soviet handlers, was sentenced by a federal judge to three life terms plus ten years.

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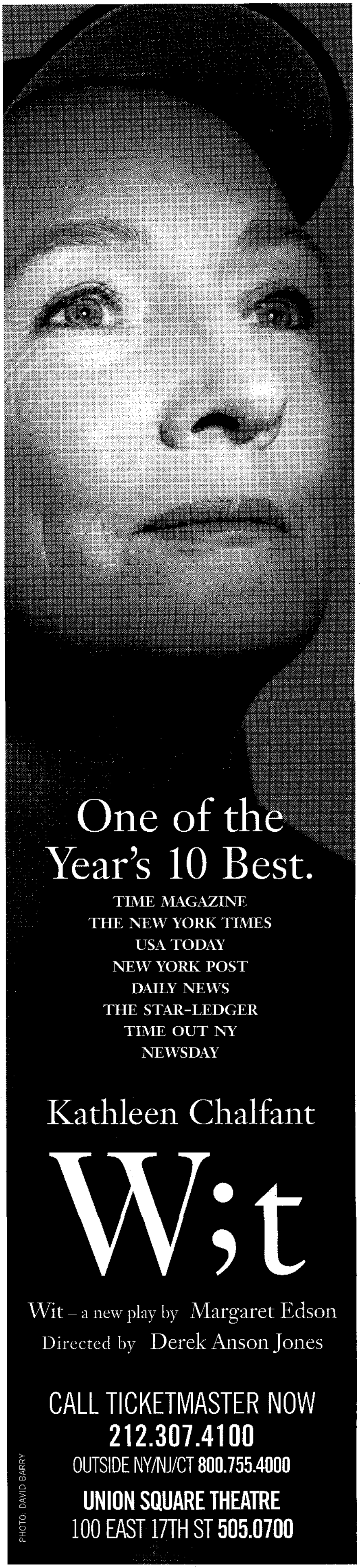
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-840-8489 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Ashes to Ashes—The Roundabout Theatre Company's staging of Harold Pinter's new play, directed by Karel Reisz, stars Lindsay Duncan and David Strathairn. In previews. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Blue Heart—Two one-acts by the British dramatist Caryl Churchill, in an Out of Joint staging directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Preview on Jan. 30. Opens Jan. 31 at 7:30 and continues through Feb. 21. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Captains Courageous: The Musical—Manhattan Theatre Club presents Treat Williams and Brandon Espinoza in a tuneful version of Kipling's novel. With music by Frederick Freyer and book and lyrics by Patrick Cook. In previews. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Correct Me If I'm Right—The political humorist Kate Clinton's one-woman show. In previews. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

Death of a Salesman—From Chicago's Goodman Theatre, a fiftieth-anniversary staging of Arthur Miller's play, starring Brian Dennehy, Elizabeth Franz, and Kevin Anderson. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

The Eros Trilogy—Betty Buckley, T. Scott Cunningham, and Zak Orth star in three short works by Nicky Silver, centered on the mother-and-son relationship. David Warren is the director. In previews. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)

High Life—Four morphine-blitzed crooks plot a bank heist, in a black comedy by first-time playwright Lee MacDougall. Opens Jan. 27 at 7. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

House/Lights—Gertrude Stein's libretto for the opera "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" and the 1964 cult film "Olga's House of Shame" are the inspirations for the Wooster Group's latest work. In previews through Jan. 28. Opens Jan. 29 at 8. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

The Mineola Twins—In Paula Vogel's dark comedy, Swoosie Kurtz portrays both a good sister and her evil twin. Directed by Joe Mantello. In previews. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9300.)

The Misanthrope—Martin Crimp's new version of Molière's comedy, starring Uma Thurman and Roger Rees, is set in present-day London. Previews begin Jan. 28. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200.)

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown—Clark Gesner's 1967 musical based on the Charles Schulz comic strip, directed by Michael Mayer. In previews. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

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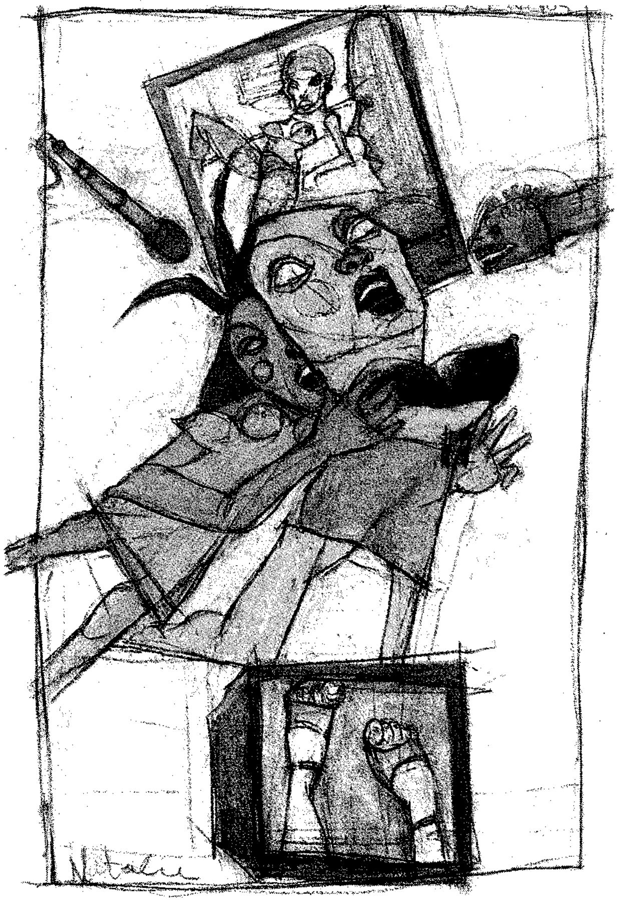
OPENED RECENTLY

Awake and Sing—Anne Jackson leads the cast in an Actors Studio staging of Clifford Odets' 1935 drama, about a lower-class Bronx family. (Raw Space, 529 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 31.)

The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job, and she and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, but it takes all of their charisma to give an iota of life to this show's cardboard characters and charmless script—an adaptation by David Hare of Arthur Schnitzler's Viennese sexual merry-go-round, "La Ronde." There's nothing erotic here, and even the news of Ms. Kidman's nudity has been greatly exaggerated. Directed by Sam Mendes. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/28/98 & 1/4/99.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)



"House/Lights," from the Wooster Group.

The Captain's Tiger—A theatrical memoir, set on a steamer bound for Asian ports, by the South African playwright Athol Fugard, who leads the cast. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Cherry Orchard—A Westside Repertory Theatre staging of Chekhov's play, directed by Alex Roe. (252 W. 81st St. 874-7290. Closes Feb. 14.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Electra—When the superb Zoë Wanamaker first appears onstage in the title role of David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' tragedy (in a new version by Frank McGuinness), she is wedged in an alcove halfway up the exterior wall of her dead father's palace, wearing the ancient mask of tragedy; she descends to earth and takes off the mask to show us the modern face of torment. It is the first of several huge, shrewdly staged moments in a production that allows the play's bewildering brutality to come through as clearly as yesterday's headlines. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

An Evening with Quentin Crisp—The author, actor, and wit celebrates his ninetieth year, with a return engagement of his one-man show. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 330-7200. Closes Jan. 31.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Fosse—A tribute to the choreographer's work, created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Iphigenia Cycle—Theatre for a New Audience presents Euripides' "Iphigenia at Aulis" and "Iphigenia in Tauris," under the direction of JoAnne Akalaitis. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Killer Joe—In Tracy Letts's graphic dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. Though the experience sometimes feels like being trapped in Sam Shepard's claustrophobic Nowheresville while being smacked around by Quentin Tarantino, the terrific production is so vividly unself-conscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all—in fact, you enjoy it. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Little by Little—Liz Larsen, Christiane Noll, and Darrin Baker portray childhood friends who become

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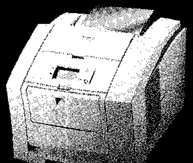

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caryl Churchill's "Blue Heart," at BAM.

involved in a love triangle as adults, in a new musical from the York Theatre Company. With music by Brad Ross, lyrics by Ellen Greenfield and Hal Hackady, and a story by Ms. Greenfield and Annette Jolles. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

Little Me—Martin Short carries this musical-comedy relic on his cute little shoulders with ease. But the show—a spoof of celebrity rags-to-riches stories, which originally starred Sid Caesar, in 1962, in multiple roles—is a relic, so audience members not madly in love with Short (who are these people?) may find themselves scratching their heads, wondering how the innocent/ribald silliness ever inspired more than minor laughs. Written by Neil Simon (book), Cy Coleman (music), and Carolyn Leigh (lyrics). (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300. Closes Feb. 7.)

A Majority of One—A Jewish widow (Phyllis Newman) falls in love with a retired Japanese businessman (Randall Duk Kim), in Leonard Spigelgass's 1959 comedy, set aboard a cruise ship after the Second World War. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told—Paul Rudnick's new version of a very old tale—starring Alan Tudyk and Jay Goede as Adam and Steve and Becky Ann Baker and Kathryn Meisle as Jane and Mable—moves to the Minetta Lane Theatre on Jan. 29. (18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

The Mystery of Irma Vep—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. But drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is an artifact of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Parade—This musical, co-conceived and directed by Hal Prince, with a book by Alfred Uhry and lyrics and music by Jason Robert Brown, revisits the case of Leo Frank, a college-educated Northern Jew who in 1913 was accused of murdering a teen-age girl in the Atlanta pencil factory that he managed, only to be taken from jail in 1915 by anti-Semitic vigilantes and lynched. It is generally believed that Frank was railroaded, and this show feels like a train hauling a heavy cargo of exposition uphill to a preset destination. The hard work that went into "Parade" is transparent, but in the theatre it's originality, not earnestness, that wins the day. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Paradise Hotel—A new mind bender from the director and writer Richard Foreman, about a group of travellers searching for sexual nirvana. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Prater Violet—An adaptation by Will Pomerantz of Christopher Isherwood's 1945 novel. (The Salon, 432 E. 91st St. 388-8188. Closes Feb. 14.)

Shanghai Moon—Another movie spoof from the pen of Charles Busch, who stars as the wife of a British diplomat in nineteen-thirties China. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. The son (a charming, laid-back Christian Slater) serves as a biographer of sorts, whose combined detachment from and involvement in the family is mirrored by the director Michael Mayer's expert staging, as he moves in and out of remembered scenes, alternately commenting on and participating in their chaos. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Some Voices—As an educational film on returning the mentally ill to society, Joe Penhall's script could be remarkable. As a play, however, even the strong, heartfelt acting by the talented cast of this New Group production can't save it from being loud, predictable, and sappy. Max Baker's beautifully modulated performance as the brother of a schizophrenic should be a reminder to Mr. Penhall and to the director, Frank Pugliese, that powerful emotion can be expressed without shouting. Kevin Price's elegant, versatile sets are also a consolation. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 6.)

Stop Kiss—Diana Son's modern tragicomedy, about two heretofore heterosexual young women (Jessica Hecht and Sandra Oh) falling in love in New York, is a small wonder. The fine production shifts back and forth seamlessly between scenes that lead up to the friends' first kiss and scenes that follow it, in the aftermath of a brutal, bias-inspired assault. It's a sweet dream and a nightmare at once, a juxtaposition that makes both sides of life more resonant. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Jan. 31.)

Wang Dang—Tom Noonan wrote, directed, and stars in a play about a has-been filmmaker guest-lecturing at a small college. (Paradise Theatre, 64 E. 4th St. 253-8107. Closes Feb. 14.)

Whoa-Jack!—Büchner's "Woyzeck" is transplanted to the American South of the sixties, in a jazz-accompanied adaptation by Jeff Cohen. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195. Closes Feb. 8.)

Wit—In this first play by Margaret Edson, about the life and death (from ovarian cancer) of a John Donne scholar, Kathleen Chalfant gives an excruciating, powerful performance as Dr. Vivian Bearing, one of those larger-than-life professors who are terrifyingly smart, and proud of it. Dressed in a hospital gown and pushing an I.V. pole, Bearing plays games with words, which are giddily, awfully, hilarious (they are, in fact, the essence of wit); but word games will not save her, and she knows it. Right up to the last second, "Wit" has riches of acting, writing, and stagecraft that you revel in, even in the atmosphere of death, and it is directed with just the right touch by Derek Anson Jones. Watching it isn't easy—it isn't easy to watch human beings be tested, knowing they can only fail—and yet you feel that the play's lessons and pleasures amount to a kind of second chance, to an amazing grace. (1/18/99) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **COLLECTED STORIES:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE SOUND OF MUSIC:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Jan. 27 at 8: "Irish Fantasy," "Bugaku," and "Chaconne." . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Sonatine," "In G Major," and "Symphony in C." . . . ¶ Jan. 29 at 8: "Walton Cello Concerto," "La Valse," and "Chaconne." . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 2: "Variations on a Nursery Song," "Bugaku," and "Symphonic Dances." . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 8: "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Sonatine," "La Valse," and "In G Major." . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 3: "Irish Fantasy," "Chiaroscuro," "Valse-Fantaisie," and "Concerti Armonici." . . . ¶ Feb. 2 at 8: "Ballo Della Regina," "Dances at a Gathering," and "Symphonic Dances." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through Feb. 28.)

Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg—The thirty-three-member troupe performs four programs, one a pair of plotless works ("Requiem" and "My Jerusalem") and three full-length story ballets (a version of "The Brothers Karamazov" and biographical treatments of Tchaikovsky and Olga Spessivtseva), all choreographed by Boris Eifman, formerly of the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 26-29 at 8, Jan. 30 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 31 at 2.)

Ballet British Columbia—The Vancouver-based company presents four works by Canadian choreographers: "Sex Is My Religion," by John Alleyne; "There, Below," by James Kudelka; "Conversation Piece," by Mark Godden; and "The Fall," by Serge Bennathan. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Jan. 26-29 at 8, Jan. 30 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 31 at 2 and 7:30.)

Carnival—Dance Theatre Workshop kicks off a two-month-long series designed to give extended exposure to emerging companies. Jan. 26-27 and Jan. 30 at 8 and Jan. 31 at 3: **WALLY CARDONA QUARTET**, in "Open House 01." Through Feb. 14. . . . ¶ Jan. 28-29 at 8: **ANDREA E. WOODS**, in "Rememorabilia." (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. The festival continues through March 28.)

"Hindsight"—For their fifth collaboration, the choreographer Vicky Schick and the set designer Barbara Kilpatrick have drawn from both the avant-garde—"Last Year at Marienbad"—and the truly underground: New York City subways. According to Kilpatrick, whose latex panels, costumes, and props form an integral part of the evening-length work, the collaborative process is deceptively simple: "We ride the subways together and watch the tableaux that develop." Schick adds, "Whenever I'm in the subway I think, Why make a dance? People are such excellent performers—they're natural and totally committed to what they're doing." She and her six-member company try to re-create such sublimely offhand moments. "What I find most appealing," she says, "is when a dancer moves with total attention but as if they're doing a simple task, like walking down the street or sitting in a chair." (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 28-31 at 8:30.)

Doug Elkins Dance Company—The synthetic choreographer, whose movement style switches easily from hip-hop to sinuous modern dance, presents an hour-long program of works for his nine-member troupe: "More Wine for Polyphemus" and excerpts from "More Winter, Stand," "The Testosterone Diversions," and "Narcoleptic Lovers." (The New Victory Theatre, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Jan. 28-29 at 7, Jan. 30 at 2 and 7, and Jan. 31 at noon and 5.)

"Die Flasche Ist Ganz Leer"—The choreographer DD Dorvillier and her three collaborators, Sarah Michelson, Peter Jacobs, and Willa Caroll, offer a loose revision of Wagner's "Tannhäuser" as a mysterious quartet set to the music of Jonathan Bepler. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 28-31 at 8:30.)

"Vaudeville 2000"—Buster Brown, Marion Coles, Brenda Bufalino, Karen Zebulon, the Young Hoofers, the Tap Tramps, and a host of other dancers present signature routines, classic thirties pieces, song-and-dance satires, improvisations, and tap premières. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Jan. 28-30 at 7:30 and Jan. 31 at 3 and 7:30.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Dizzy Gillespie Tribute—Some of Gillespie's most gifted accomplices—saxophonist Jimmy Heath, trombonist Slide Hampton, pianist Mike Longo, and trumpeter Jon Faddis—pay tribute to the man with the upturned horn. (Abrons Arts Center, Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 598-0400. Jan. 28 at 7.)

Rage Against the Machine / Beastie Boys—Who said the Age of Aquarius is over? The world's finest radical-left aural terrorists join the world's hippest Buddhist B-boys, in a benefit for the imprisoned poet and accused murderer Mumia Abu-Jamal. It's questionable whether either band's fans care much about any political cause, but with the decibel level so high, you'll never know. With Bad Religion. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. Jan. 28 at 7.)

Herbie Nichols Project / Ben Allison and Medicine Wheel—The underappreciated pianist and composer Nichols (1919-63) was a musician's musician who recorded only a handful of times and passed most of his career in obscurity. The work, though, is all golden, with an outsider tinge and a formal perfection that rival Thelonious Monk's. Nichols recorded his tunes only in piano-trio settings, so it'll be a pleasure to hear them fleshed out by a horn-driven band. The Project's extravagantly gifted bassist, Ben Allison, also leads his own smashing ensemble, Medicine Wheel, which includes two gripping saxophonists, Ted Nash and Michael Blake. Presented by the Jazz Composers Collective. (Jazz Performance Space, New School, 55 W. 13th St. 995-1552. Jan. 28 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Baby Jupiter, 170 Orchard St. (982-2229)—Fans of smart, catchy, XTC-grade pop should get to this downtown club on Jan. 28, when **yazbek** sets up shop. Onetime Letterman staff writer, *Spy* contributor, and jingle composer David Yazbek has turned his full attention to his music over the past couple of years, releasing two great albums, "Tock" and "Laughing Man." Yazbek leads with virtuoso piano work, drummer Dean Sharenow and bassist Chris Smylie couldn't be tighter, and the Urban Blight horns add sock and texture.

ONLY CONNECT

eBay (http://www.ebay.com)—This virtual auction house's stunning I.P.O. last November and its seemingly gravity-defying stock price ($321, as of this writing) have caused quite a stir in the financial pages. But while the site's success bodes well for E-commerce (people buy and sell goods here at a volume that would have been unthinkable a year ago) eBay also represents a triumph of another kind. In the same way that such virtual communities as the Well or Echo have proved that the virtual relationship can safely translate into the actual—members of both have been meeting, and more, for years—eBay has proved that it's possible to engage safely in on-line bartering, too. You need only put your money where your mouse is.

Here's how it works. Say you want to sell a limited-edition Elvis night-light (the thousand-plus categories on the site include Elvis and Beanie Babies). After registering with eBay and paying a nominal fee based on the value of the item, you post a description (as well as a photo, if you wish) with a starting bid and expiration date for the auction, then sit back and watch the E-mail fly. According to eBay, which bills itself as "the world's largest personal online trading community," seventy per cent of listed items sell. And what of the disreputable dealer or deadbeat buyer? This is where the honor system comes in. eBay does not accept "anonymous" E-mail accounts (Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc.), and, while members of the eBay community are expected to settle disputes among themselves, unscrupulous traders (or buyers) will be blackballed. Other virtual auction houses are out there, of course, but at some point even crooks run out of cyberspace.

eBay's founder, Pierre Omidyar, got the inspiration for the site from his fiancée, "an avid Pez collector," who wanted a marketplace in which to trade her candy dispensers. But if the idea of Pez dispensers (or Hummel figurines, Furbies, Madame Alexander dolls, etc.) fills you with ennui, and maybe even nausea, take heart: you can also find Quaker quilts on eBay, not to mention rare records, out-of-print books, coins—even baseball bats used by Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire. (Batters not included.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Jan. 27-28: **dave davies,** a Kinks stalwart but never the star, continues his new career as a front man, and he easily carries the weight. He now sings a strong lead instead of high harmony, his power guitar is still one of rock's wonders, and his demeanor in the spotlight is relaxed and assured. Touring behind a new retrospective release of his recordings, Davies draws not only from his solo work but also does some classic Kinks songs that he neither wrote nor sang lead on, and he boldly claims them as his own.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Jan. 30: The Boston-based lounge act **lars vegas,** whose latest album, "Smoking," includes a song about the Hair Club for Men president (and client) Sy Sperling. The **mingus big band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Jan. 28-29: **lucinda williams,** a forty-five-year-old unfashionable, unglamorous songwriter from Baton Rouge who is the spiritual daughter of Robert Johnson and Howlin' Wolf. She's touring in support of her improbably fine album "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road," which was criminally ignored in this year's Grammy nominations. Jan. 30: **toshi reagon and big lovely.** The fierce singer does celebratory shows—showers of retro-funk, urban blues, and folk, all sung with evangelical fervor.

Maxwells, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. (201-798-0406)—Jan. 30: **dave davies.** (See the Bottom Line.)

Tonic, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Jan. 31: **damon & naomi.** The former backbone of Galaxie 500, bassist and vocalist Naomi Yang and drummer Damon Krukowski have been making haunting pop founded on Yang's velvety voice since the demise of that cult favorite earlier in the decade. They recorded their latest album, "Playback Singers," at their home in Cambridge, Massachusetts (the only audience was their cat), and its songs fill you up like the scent of coffee brewing in a warm kitchen.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Jan. 29: **yo la tengo,** the best thing to come out of Hoboken since Francis Albert Sinatra. Jan. 30: Industrial noise and avant-pop from **blonde redhead,** New York's only half-Japanese, half-Italian coed combo.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jan. 26-31: **jon hendricks and annie ross.** Dining.

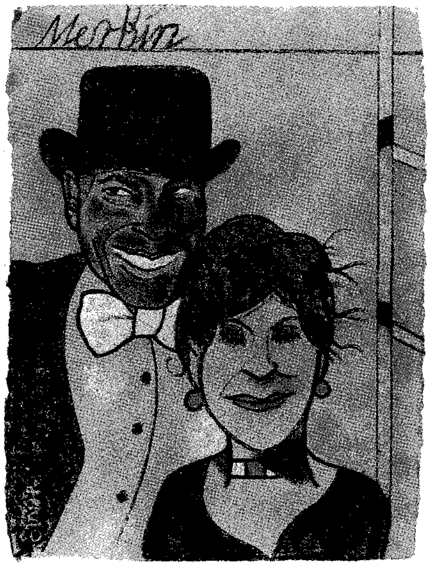
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and the amazing **eartha kitt.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **peter mintun** is in attendance.

Cove Bistro, 2 South End Ave. (964-1500)—**people like us** (Jan. 28) are back on their feet again with a new drummer after the sudden death of the marvellous Denis Charles. Pianist, composer, and leader Joel Forrester, bassist Dave Hofstra, and baritone saxophonist Claire Daly are witty players who know that mirth ain't worth much without musical muscle behind it.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—**jacky terrasson** (here through Jan. 31) is a defiantly eccentric pianist, the kind of bursting-at-the-seams talent who continually walks the line between daring flights of imagination and self-conscious mannerisms. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **les paul.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The neo-free-jazz tenor saxophonist **david s. ware** (Jan. 28) recently caught hold of the brass ring on the jazz-market merry-go-round. Lured to Columbia Records by Branford Marsalis, Ware, to everyone's amazement, now records for a major corporation. But his recent disk, "Go See the World," shows no signs of corporate compromise. Ware and his tight-knit band—bassist **william parker,** pianist **matthew shipp,** and drummer **suzie ibarra**—still draw from an avant-garde tradition that has never ruled out full-on expressionistic bluster. Label-mate Barbra Streisand is in for serious conniptions if anyone dares to play for her Ware's deconstruction of "The Way We Were." Feb. 1: Two old bandmates, saxophonist **tim berne** and cellist **hank roberts,** summon up the old chemistry.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Jan. 26-31: The **GREG OSBY FIVE.** Fifteen or so years after he first drew attention as a key player in M-Base—the Brooklyn-based conglomerate that did what it could to shake up the jazz establishment—Osby is once again drawing considerable critical attention. It seems that this sharp altoist never let the radical rhetoric interfere with practice; he's refined his rhythmic approach to post-bop saxophone to the point where the occasional conventional lick stands out like a mismatched tie. He's got the fine young vibraphonist **STEFON HARRIS** as a frontline partner. Dining.



TWISTED: *"My analyst told me / That I was right outta my head. / The way he described it, / He said I'd be better dead than live." So jived Annie Ross to a riffy, bouncing-ball tune by Wardell Gray in "Twisted," a number that became not only the wittiest sendup of Freud ever written (by the singer herself) but something of an anthem for Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, the hippest vocal group in jazz history. During the fifties and early sixties, this nutty ménage à trois—Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, and Ross—spit-polished the best jazz tunes of the day, from Ellington and Basie to Horace Silvers and Cannonball Adderley, with uncanny vocalese, too-close-for-comfort harmonies, and a terrific sense of swing. Now, nearly four decades after the trio's breakup (in 1962) and Lambert's death (in 1966), Hendricks and Ross are together again for a reunion at the Blue Note, beginning January 26. By all reports, they're still—joyously—twisted.*

Tonic, 107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Jan. 28-30: Downtown noise-jazz pioneer **ARTO LINDSAY.**

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Jan. 26-31: The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA,** the granddaddy of all Monday-night big bands, celebrates its thirty-third anniversary. Outliving both of its founders—flugelhornist, composer, and arranger Thad Jones and drummer Mel Lewis—the orchestra has taken on a thriving artistic identity of its own.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper 1969-1993," an exhibition of fifty-four drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and woodcuts acquired by the museum in 1995. Through March 21. . . . ¶ "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." That a sixteenth-century Old Master might be overhyped seems unlikely, but that's what's going on here. Dosso Dossi, a painter at the court of the Estes, was virtually unknown except to specialists until a scholarly reassessment began a decade ago. The exhibit's opening wall text quotes Dosso's contemporary, the epic poet Ariosto, who placed him in the company of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian, a notion that verges on the ridiculous. Certainly there's some superb work on display—a sumptuous painting of the sorceress Melissa, a character from Ariosto (perhaps the poet's over-the-top praise was payback), and a delightful scene from Ovid, of Virtue getting the runaround from Jupiter and Mercury—but much of it is uninspired. By all means see the show, but don't expect to witness art history being rewritten. Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Cubism and Fashion." Through March 14. . . . ¶ "Donato Creti: Melancholy and Perfection" showcases an early-eighteenth-century painter (1671-1749), the last in a line of Bolognese classicists. Through Jan. 31. . . . ¶ "Charles Burchfield from the Collection," a survey of the museum's holdings of this great, eccentric American painter (1893-1967). Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ A small selection of works by the Swiss artist Félix Vallotton (1865-1925) comprises a few undistinguished paintings and some fascinating woodcuts, which record scenes of the anarchic frenzy that gripped Paris in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He chronicles episodes of police brutality, a panicking mob of demonstrators, and a crowd of patriots singing in the streets, with the keen eye of Daumier and the graphic vigor of Beardsley. "The Moving Sidewalk" wittily depicts tourists at the 1900 World's Fair trying out the first escalator. Through Feb. 21. . . . ¶ "Jade of Ancient Costa Rica." Through Feb. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Julia Margaret Cameron's Women" presents fifty-seven prints by the early photographer (1815-1879), whose idealized portraits of Victorian women (including Julia Jackson, the mother of Virginia Woolf, and Alice Liddell, the model for Lewis Carroll's Alice) often presented them as nymphs or goddesses. Opens Jan. 28. . . . ¶ "Jackson Pollock," a comprehensive retrospective—the first in the United States since 1967—of the artist many regard as the most influential American painter of this century. It would be hard to fault the installation or the choice of works: in addition to many smaller drawings and canvases, the Modern has secured all of the major large pictures, from the mural that Peggy Guggenheim commissioned for her foyer in 1943 to the late "Blue Poles" (1952). Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Focus: Pollock and Printmaking." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Dubuffet to de Kooning: Expressionist Prints from Europe and America." Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Sight Gags: Grotesque, Caricature, and Wit in Modern and Contemporary Drawing." Through May 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on view. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The Duane Hanson (1925-96) retrospective brings together a comprehensive selection of the artist's amazingly realistic re-creations of middle-class Americans: life-size casts of construction workers, a tough-looking cop, a weary maid, a bored flea-market vender. The tone of ironic condescension, however faint, sometimes overpowers the work: it can be difficult, even on the second or third glance, to distinguish the real tacky tourist from the sculptured tacky tourist, and the viewer is left with only the technique to admire (it is, admittedly, mighty impressive). Whatever you do, don't stand still. Through Feb. 28. . . . ¶ "Ray Johnson: Correspondences" chronicles the work of the founder of the "New York Correspondence School," one of the earliest examples of the mail-art movement. Through March 21. . . . ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Pale Guide to Transparent Things," an exhibition of photographs by Seton Smith. Through April 4. . . . ¶ "Circular Breathing," a video installation by Gary Hill. Through March 21. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter" offers some four hundred examples of lepidoptera in a specially constructed vivarium. Through Feb. 28. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Domestic Transformations: Working in Brooklyn" features paintings and sculptures by borough residents Ann Agee, Ron Baron, Jean Blackburn, and Andy Yoder. Through March 14. . . . ¶ "Lewis Wickes Hine: The Final Years" presents documentary work from the thirties, of such sites of immigrant activity as Ellis Island and the Lower East Side. The realist photographer (1874-1940) created this body of work hoping—in vain—to secure an assignment from the Farm Security Administration. Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Dahesh Museum, 601 Fifth Ave., at 49th St. (759-0606)—"A Victorian Salon: Paintings from the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth, England" offers thirty-five examples of nineteenth-century British painting (allegories, pastoral landscapes, ringleted goddesses) originally displayed at the Royal Bath Hotel, a sort of seaside Belagio in the latter days of the Empire. Through April 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

The New Museum, 583 Broadway (219-1222)—"Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz," the first retrospective of the onetime teen-age runaway, who used pizza boxes and trash-can lids to fashion his canny collages and social critiques until his death, in 1992, at the age of thirty-eight. Through Sept. 13. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Bruno Andrade—The most cheerful (if not exactly the most demanding) painting show in town—faux-naïve floral still-lifes, with pronounced echoes of Matisse, drawing on the gaudy palette of a Mexican border town. (The artist is a native of San Antonio, which, as any Texan will tell you, is a suburb of Mexico.) Through Jan. 30. (MB Modern, 41 E. 57th St. 371-3444.)

Henry Darger (1892-1973)—A fascinating exhibition exploring the twisted world of this quintessential outsider artist, a Chicago recluse who devoted his life to collecting twine and writing and illustrating what may be the longest, most unreadable novel of all time: "The Story of the Vivian Girls in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal or the Glandelinian War Storm or the Glandico-Abbiennian Wars, as Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." Running to 15,145 typewritten pages, Darger's book narrates a war between a kingdom of evil, child-enslaving men, the Glandelinians, and the good, Christian nation of Abbiennia. To illustrate this madness, Darger raided comics and coloring books for imagery, creating a cycle of large pencil-and-watercolor drawings of simpering little girls, many of them nude, being menaced by wicked men. At once chilling and naïve. Through March 13. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Damian Loeb—Blandly executed, overbearing photorealistic paintings that combine images of American banality with scenes of violence. One of them lifts a Lauren Greenfield photograph of L.A. kids cruising in a convertible and juxtaposes it with a grisly newspaper photo of a shoot-out in South Africa. Yeah, it's cool, but the Benetton ad campaign from a few years back did it better. Through Feb. 13. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929.)

Chris Macdonald—A playful series of oil-crayon drawings of construction sites, with trucks, steamrollers, and backhoes rendered as vividly colored blobs scattered across a black ground. The musical effect, reminiscent of Stuart Davis's jazzy tributes to New York, is somewhat vitiated by Macdonald's random compositions. Through Feb. 20. (Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810.)

William Wood / "Surrealist Drawings"—Mysterious abstract patterns, suavely executed in a waxy medium, reproducing the modulated grays of a black-and-white photograph. They seem to depict real but normally invisible phenomena—microscopic views of blood corpuscles, an astronomer's enhancement of cosmic radio waves—with a mechanical mindlessness that gives blandness a distinctly creepy edge. / A small, well-chosen group of drawings—by Ossorio, Tanguy, Matta, Tchelitchew, and Dali—hangs in the back gallery, to underline Wood's debt to Surrealist dreamscapes. Unfortunately, Wood's versions pale in comparison. Through Feb. 13. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227.)

"Epic Painting"—Three monumental abstract paintings from the nineteen-seventies dominate the main gallery. Adolph Gottlieb's "Triptych" reads like a Chinese landscape scroll, with bursts of black blots balanced against an atmospheric expanse; at nineteen feet, it was the largest painting he ever produced. There is also a profoundly tranquillizing field painting by Richard Pousette-Dart ("White Silence," a network of shimmering pointillistic brushstrokes) and a rather blunt Motherwell. In the small gallery are some preparatory drawings for the paintings, including a perfect little watercolor of "Triptych." Through Jan. 30. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550.)

"River Scenes of France"—Paintings and drawings by many of the greatest (and some of the lesser-known) Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Among the treasures are a witty pen-and-ink drawing by Seurat of a lady in a bustle, fishing, sketched on the back of an envelope; an exquisite painting by Caillebotte of the Seine, a rural landscape that glows with light; and an outstanding Monet of the village of Vétheuil at sundown, glistening with gold. The exhibit also includes first-rate work by Courbet, Pissarro, Sisley, and Boudin, as well as a large number of Parisian scenes by a painter named Albert Marquet, including a fine view of Notre Dame in the snow. Through Feb. 6. (Wildenstein, 19 E. 64th St. 879-0500. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Short List—**benny andrews,** ACA, 41 E. 57th St. 644-8300. Through Feb. 27. . . . **richard baker,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780. Through Feb. 13. . . . **jennifer bartlett,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through March 13. . . . **alexander calder,** Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 489-3331. Through March 6. . . . **robert la hotan,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through Feb. 6. . . . **louis lozowick,** Mary Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669. Through March 6. . . . **mark mahosky,** Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 924-0858. Through Feb. 20. . . . **steven mc callum,** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-4997. Through Feb. 20. . . . **giovanni battista piranesi,** Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7288. Through March 20. . . . **robert ryman,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Feb. 6. . . . **charles simonds,** Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888. Through Feb. 20. . . . **keith sonnier** and **vincent desiderio,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; both shows through Feb. 13. . . . **max weber,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545. Through Feb. 20.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Tony Fitzpatrick—In "Bum Town," a series of small chicken-scratch drawings, the artist employs his usual raw, disparate iconography (prison tattoos, religious ex-votos, and sideshow banners) in a pained tribute to his father, a burial-vault salesman for whom the slaughterhouses and rail yards of Chicago's South Side mapped out life's lessons. Through Jan. 30. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

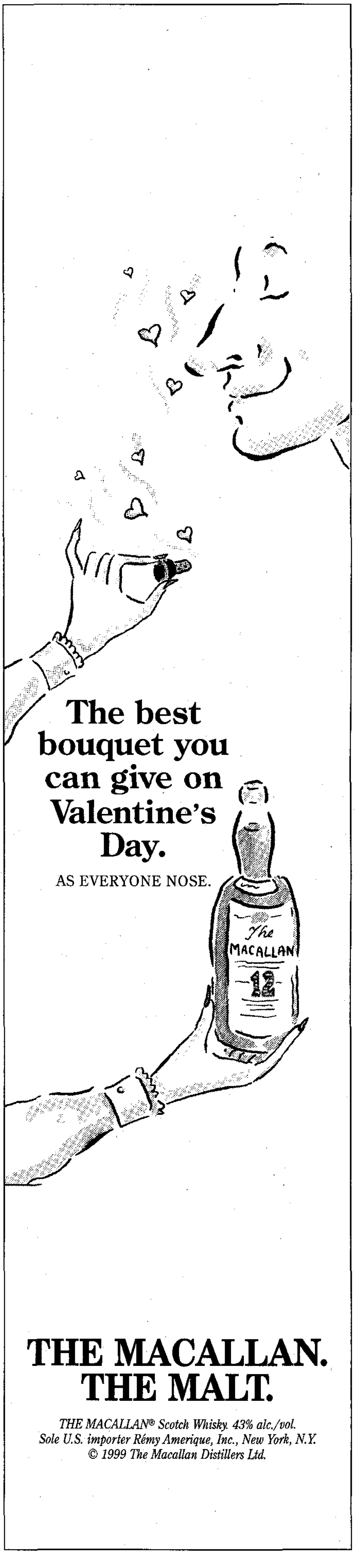
Scott Reeder—Paintings and sculptures that straddle the line between the two genres. The artist's palette tends toward washes of pastels, and there is a dreamy "Romper Room" aspect to the works. Pale-blue thought bubbles or clouds are stacked against a wall with self-conscious informality; an aqueous abstraction resolves itself in a quasi-sculptural puddle on the floor. The pictures are pretty, or wanly humorous, such as one depicting a pirate. Who says you can't win on charm? Through Feb. 27. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366.)

Rudolf Stingel—A suite of dreary sculptures by an artist who has previously turned out some sparkling mixed-medium installations. These radiator grilles cast in aluminum have an appearance of extreme decrepitude. Perhaps Stingel, having created works of such effervescent prettiness in the past, wished to demonstrate that he could work his hand at ugliness just as well. Through Feb. 13. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Short List—**david dupuis,** Eller, 529 W. 20th St. 206-6411. Through Feb. 6. . . . **rainer ganahl,** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Jan. 30. . . . **diego gravinese,** De Chiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007. Through Feb. 14. . . . **amy hill,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through Feb. 20. . . . **nina katchadourian,** Debs, 529 W. 20th St. 647-7080. Through Feb. 13. . . . **john kirchner,** Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 966-9024. Through Feb. 13. . . . **micah lexier** and **jonathan seliger,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Both shows through Feb. 6. . . . **albert oehlen,** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100. Through Feb. 27. . . . **rob pruitt,** Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258. Through Feb. 27. . . . **william steiger,** Thatcher, 529 W. 20th St. 675-0222. Through Feb. 6. . . . **michael timpson** and **ellen harvey,** Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600. Both shows through Feb. 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Inka Essenhigh / Tom Shannon—Essenhigh makes large-scale paintings with slick enamel surfaces. Floating through them are any number of representational homunculi, and many seem to have strayed out of Japanimation. The artist's works belong to that now capacious stream of tendency toward fantastic yet obscure narratives. / Shannon's sculpture "Serene in Suspense" is a life-size realization in alabaster resin of a nude woman lying on her back, suspended by a thin cord. Apparently, a magnet in her head aligns her with the North Pole. We should all be so serene yet so directed. Both shows through Feb. 13. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)



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Roxy Paine—An intriguing show of sculptures which contrasts the laboriously handmade with the mechanically produced. Paine has created an array of quasi-naturalist works that at first glance appear to be various plants and fungi simply brought indoors: for example, a bed of tall grass, equipped with a motor underneath causing a gentle vibration of the sprigs. On the other hand, the artist has also rigged an elaborate sculpture-making machine: a funnel excretes blobs of whitish synthetic material onto a moving conveyor belt. Not exactly readymades in the pure Duchampian sense, these are then signed and numbered as an edition. Through Feb. 20. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232.)

Frances Stark—Works on paper, some incorporating elements such as photographs or a sheet of Mylar. Stark's drawings initially appear to be an abstract series of repeated letters drawn through carbon paper, but they often have a "key," so that with careful attention one can discern quotations from Robert Musil and Daniel Buren. Those who do not wish to engage in such heavy labor, however, may simply admire their delicacy. Through Feb. 6. (C.R.G., 93 Grand St. 966-4360.)

"Avoiding Objects"—A group show curated by Alice Smits which could just as well be called "Inscrutable Stuff." The selection includes works by Man Ray, Ann Hamilton, Donald Lipski, David Tudor, and others. Their sensuous qualities vacillate between the plainly seductive and the nearly repugnant: for example, a flat of fragrant baby powder by Job Koelewijn has a discreet minimalist presence, while Jan Fabre's theatrical dress composed of dead jewel beetles gives off a distinctly noisome odor. Through Feb. 6. (Apex, 291 Church St. 431-5270.)

An untitled photograph by Guy Bourdin, at Pace Wildenstein MacGill.

"North and South Connected"—A small but important show outlining affinities both subtle and strong between some postwar abstract artists and the pre-Columbian civilizations. In some cases, it's a matter of direct quotation: a small, vividly colored grid painting by Alfred Jensen makes enigmatic use of the numbering system of the Maya; an exquisite weaving by Anni Albers (Josef's wife) is fringed with braided string, suggestive of quipu, the system of knots used by the Incas for cross-country communication. Other connections are more oblique, as in the hieroglyph-like images of a classic painting by Adolph Gottlieb. The twentieth-century works here are well chosen, but the ancient Peruvian textiles are magnificent. Through Jan. 30. (Torres, 140 Greene St. 431-5869.)

Short List—**peter flaccus,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. 966-2625. Through Feb. 20. . . . **lucio fontana,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through Feb. 13. . . . **michael goldberg,** Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012. Through Feb. 20. . . . **ben katchor,** Bronfman Center, 7 E. 10th St. 998-4114. Open Mondays through Thursdays, 8 to 10; Fridays, 8 to 4; through Feb. 28. . . . **tony matelli,** Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through Feb. 13. . . . **paul mc carthy and jason rhoades,** Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Feb. 13. . . . **takashi murakami,** Boesky, 51 Greene St. 941-9888. Through Feb. 18. . . . **manuel neri,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. 925-3500. Through Jan. 30. . . . **judy pfaff,** McCready, 425 W. 13th St. 243-0439. Through Feb. 27. . . . **david rabinowitch,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through Feb. 5. . . . **david salle,** at Lehmann Maupin (39 Greene St., 965-0753; through March 6) and Gagosian (136 Wooster St., 228-2828; through Feb. 27). . . . **roger shimomura,** Steinbaum Krauss, 132 Greene St. 431-4224. Through Feb. 13. . . . **sandy skoglund,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Feb. 13. . . . **jordan tinker,** Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through Feb. 27.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Jan. 27: Old Master drawings, including a notable Dürer depiction, in brown ink, of the goddess Isis kneeling. . . . ¶ Jan. 27-28: Old Master paintings, with Brueghel the Younger's "The Triumph of Death" and Poussin's "The Agony in the Garden" among the highlights. . . . ¶ Jan. 29: A wide-ranging auction of European decorative art and furniture, including a collection of medieval pieces. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Jan. 28: Old Master drawings. . . . ¶ Jan. 29: Old Master paintings. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

Doyle—Furniture, decorative arts, and Old Master paintings and drawings. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. Jan. 27.)

Swann—Posters, with an emphasis on skiing. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Jan. 28.)

National Black Fine Art Show—The third installment of this gathering of dealers specializing in traditional African, Caribbean, and African-American work. (Puck Building, Houston St. at Lafayette St. Jan. 29-31, with a benefit preview on Jan. 28. For information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"Naked"—Works by Elinor Carucci, Gerald Slota, Jayne Hinds Bidaut, Michael Martone, and others. Through March 6. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

International Center of Photography—Shadowy black-and-white pictures, from the summer of 1959, of the Jokers, a Brooklyn gang of tight-T-shirt-wearing, tattooed hoodlums (by today's standards they look clean-cut), all tough and indisputably cool. Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**guy bourdin,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through March 6. . . . **martin chambí** and **désiré charnay,** Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St. 223-1059. Through Feb. 6. . . . **bruce cratsley,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through Feb. 14. . . . **patrick demarchelier,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300. Through Feb. 27. . . . **william eggleston,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Feb. 27. . . . **elger esser,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through Feb. 13. . . . **franz hubmann** and **erika hubatschek,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **peter hujar and david wojnarowicz,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through Feb. 6. . . . **barry kieselstein-cord,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Feb. 13. . . . **d. w. mellor** and **josef sudek,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Feb. 20. . . . **rolf tietgens,** De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482. Through March 20.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; and for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**werther,** in a version that Massenet prepared in order to bring the title role (conceived for a tenor) within the compass of a lyric baritone; with Joyce Guyer, Ildikó Komlósi, and Thomas Hampson; conducted by Donald Runnicles. (Jan. 27 at 8.) . . . With Susan Graham instead of Ms. Komlósi (Jan. 30 at 8.) . . . **lucia di lammermoor,** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Ramón Vargas, Anthony Michaels-Moore, and Alastair Miles; Carlo Rizzi. (Jan. 28 at 8.) . . . **simon boccanegra,** by Verdi, with Karita Mattila, Plácido Domingo, Alexandru Agache, and Roberto Scandiuzzi; James Levine. (Jan. 29 and Feb. 1 at 8.) . . . **la bohème,** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Ainhoa Arteta, Frank Lopardo, Mr. Michaels-Moore, and David Pittsinger; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 30 at 1:30 and Feb. 2 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, André Previn conducting. Jan. 27 at 6:45: Richard Strauss's "Moonlight Music" from "Capriccio," his Duet-Concertino (featuring clarinettist Stanley Drucker and bassoonist Judith LeClair), and his "Der Rosenkavalier" Suite. . . . ¶ Jan. 28-30 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 7:30: An all-Strauss program comprising the Introduction, "Moonlight Music," and Final Scene from "Capriccio," the Final Scene from "Arabella," the Duet-Concertino (with Mr. Drucker and Ms. LeClair), and the Suite from "Der Rosenkavalier"; Felicity Lott is the featured soprano, assisted by baritone Richard Bernstein in the "Arabella" excerpt.

New York Virtuosi Chamber Symphony—Kenneth Klein leads the chamber orchestra and soloists Brenda Feliciano (soprano) and Jorge Caballero (guitarist) in works by Falla, Piazzolla, Rodrigo, Rodolfo Halffter, Silvestre Revueltas, and Carlos Surinach. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Jan. 27 at 8.)

St. Luke's Haydn Festival—Two concerts this week spotlight scores by Haydn and his contemporaries. Jan. 27 at 8: The St. Luke's Haydn Festival performs his F-Major Cassation (Hob. II:20) and Symphony No. 44 (the "Trauersinfonie," played by an ensemble approximating the dimensions of the composer's own orchestra at the Esterházy court), in addition to pieces by two composers who worked in his orbit: a divertimento by Michael Haydn (his younger brother) and the D-Major Horn Concerto by Leopold Mozart (father of the composer who would briefly be Haydn's best friend). (Weill Recital Hall.) . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 8: Charles Mackerras, leading the Orchestra of St. Luke's in his first concert as the group's music director, conducts a program that includes Haydn's Symphonies No. 84 and No. 98 (the former in what appears to be its first-ever performance in Carnegie Hall, strange to say). (Carnegie Hall.)

Juilliard's Focus! 1999—At the Juilliard Theatre, concluding concerts of this year's festival, in which the conservatory's students explore American music from the nineties. Jan. 27: Chamber works by Paul Marquardt, Roger Reynolds, Bernard Rands, Bright Sheng, Robert Constable, John Musto, and Lois V Vierk. . . . ¶ Jan. 28: Chamber pieces by Libby Larsen, Jeffrey Mumford, George Tsontakis, Carman Moore, Steve Mackey, and John Luther Adams. . . . ¶ Jan. 29: David Loebel conducts the Juilliard Symphony in Lou Harrison's Symphony No. 4 (with baritone Kimako Trotman), Leon Kirchner's "Music for Orchestra II" (recently retitled "Orchestra Piece"), Paul Schoenfeld's Viola Concerto (featuring Masumi Per Rostad), and Robert Beaser's "Manhattan Roll." (155 W. 65th St. Evenings at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Eos Orchestra—At the Ethical Culture Society, members of the orchestra play pieces Bernstein wrote during his college years at Harvard. Jan. 28 at 5:30: His Piano Trio and "Four Studies for Woodwind Quintet," with commentary interposed. . . . ¶ At 8: Jonathan Sheffer leads the incidental music to Aristophanes' "The Birds," the "Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs," and the Clarinet Sonata (with Richard Stoltzman, here in an orchestrated version by Sid Ramin). (2 W. 64th St. For information about tickets, call 691-6415.)

Manhattan School of Music Symphony—Glen Barton Cortese leads Rorem's "Sun" and Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky" (with soprano Lauren Flanigan, the Riverside Chorus, and the Barnard/Columbia Chorus). (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 870-6784. Jan. 29 at 8 and Jan. 31 at 3.)

New York Pops—Skitch Henderson leads a Gilbert and Sullivan program, with members of the Blue Hill Troupe. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 29 at 8.)

Russian State Symphony Orchestra—Valery Polyansky conducts Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Vladimir Spivakov), and Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" (in Ravel's orchestration). (Avery Fisher Hall. Jan. 31 at 3.)

Pittsburgh Symphony—Mariss Jansons conducts Christopher Rouse's "The Infernal Machine," Dvořák's Violin Concerto (with Midori), and Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique." (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 2 at 8.)

RECITALS

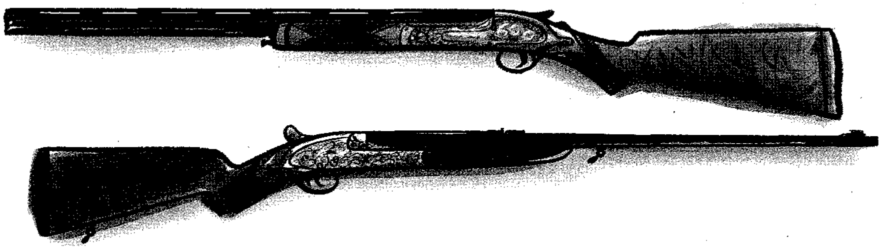
Renée Fleming—The soprano performs songs to Goethe texts, by Schubert, Glinka, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Wolf, as well as Debussy's "Ariettes Oubliées" and six lieder by Strauss; with pianist James Levine. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 27 at 7:30.)

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Great Guns

THE news about guns these days is mostly so bad that it's easy to forget that ever since they were invented, in the fourteenth century, they have been regarded as things of beauty. In midtown Manhattan, there are three stores dealing in firearms that have been crafted with such aesthetic consideration that they are as much objets d'art as they are instruments of death.

The English gunsmith **Holland & Holland** (50 E. 57th St.; 752-7755), which has been making extravagantly wrought weapons since 1835, is apparently sensitive to the controversy over gun control, since to reach its arsenal you have to spiral up four floors, past woolen knee-socks and riding jackets. The showroom—an immense chamber with billiard-table-green walls and elaborate gun closets that might have been designed by Palladio—is the bailiwick of the company's vice-president, Jan Roosenburg, a pin-striped Dutchman who proffers his merchandise with the hauteur of a man selling Rolls-Royces. H. & H. offers made-to-measure shotguns ($38,000 to $100,000), which can take three years to craft and which, Roosenburg says, might have their locks etched with such images as "dinosaurs, the labors of Hercules, or your mother-in-law." The company is best known for its double-barrelled rifles—perfect for bagging a white-tailed deer or a white rhino. He brings out a heavy .500/.465-calibre H. & H. Royal that sports a stock made of tiger-striped walnut ($100,000). Aiming the weapon at a stuffed gazelle head, he notes that the rifle's reliability and fine craftsmanship made it the choice of the legendary hunter Frederick Courtenay Selous, not to mention Teddy Roosevelt and Ernest Hemingway. Standing near a cabinet of antique guns, which start at a mere $3,000, the manager of the gun room, John Collins, adds, "We make the largest shoulder-fired rifle in the world—the .700 Nitro Express. The recoil from it will actually make your brain bounce off your skull."



As the Metropolitan Museum's recent exhibition of Renaissance armor demonstrated, northern-Italian metallurgists have long been unrivalled at turning iron into splendid objects. The venerable Lombardian gunmaker **Beretta** (718 Madison Ave.; 319-3235) has been producing exquisite firearms for nearly five centuries. The firm's Manhattan outpost is run by Peter Horn, a former Great White Hunter who can regale you with tales of how he once brought down the damnably elusive bongo and sipped yak's-blood tea. Horn's domain, tucked away in an inconspicuous town house, is a former jeweller's shop done up in the style of the Mt. Kenya Safari Club. Besides offering an extensive selection of hunting apparel in its boutique next door, Beretta still manufactures a full line of guns, priced from $600 to $60,000. Horn helped design the Jubilee shotgun ($13,750), whose lock has been engraved with almost feminine delicacy. Beretta, which once made cannons for Napoleon, also manufactures a modern-day equivalent for big-game hunters—a .500/.470-calibre elephant gun ($65,000). Horn points out, perhaps unnecessarily, "We cater to those interested in the gun as an art form, not the Saturday-night-special crowd."

Griffin & Howe (36 W. 44th St.; 921-0980), which is outfitted like a hunting lodge in Montana, used to have the gun concession in the old Abercrombie & Fitch. The store's manager, Richard Welch, keeps a skeptical eye on the steady escalation of gun prices. "The word now is caveat emptor," he says, sitting among a battery of American and European firearms, from an Ithaca trap gun ($1,250) and a nine-pound Harrison & Hussey goose gun ($7,500) to a German combination rifle designed to bag both big and small game in the Black Forest ($2,200). The shop has a matchless stock of "best guns"—rare specimens of handmade weaponry, such as two shotguns, an English Purdey ($55,000) and an Italian Abbiatico & Salvinelli ($18,500), both cradled on beds of velvet.

Charles Neidich—The clarinettist, assisted by pianist Richard Bishop, plays sonatas by Copland, Brahms (his Second), and Prokofiev (a transcription of his Flute Sonata), plus Milhaud's Sonatine and his own "In Memoriam/Spirals," for solo clarinet. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. Jan. 27 at 8. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—At Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 27 at 8: The Swedish mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter and pianist Bengt Forsberg anchor the last of three recitals with the society, this one comprising Scandinavian music: Grieg's song cycle "Haugtussa," Berwald's Septet for Winds and Strings, Nielsen's Wind Quintet (plus a group of his songs), and several pieces by Wilhelm Stenhammar (arranged by Mr. Forsberg). . . . ¶ Feb. 2 at 8: Trio sonatas and cantatas by Handel and Bach, with soprano Heidi Grant Murphy. (875-5050.)

Ned Rorem and Kurt Ollmann—The composer and pianist and the baritone team up for an hour of talk and music-making, including a performance of Mr. Rorem's "War Scenes." (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Jan. 28 at 7.)

Bargemusic—Violist Paul Neubauer and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott perform Takemitsu's "A Bird Came Down the Walk"; violinist Benny Kim and cellist Peter Rejto complete the ensemble for piano quartets by Fauré (in G Minor) and Chausson (in A Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 28 at 7:30 and Jan. 31 at 4.)

Da Capo Chamber Players—The modern-music ensemble performs the première of Louis Karchin's "American Visions" (on poems by Yevtushenko, featuring baritone André Solomon-Glover), Judith Shatin's "Songs of Anna Akhmatova," and Shostakovich's "Seven Romances on Poems of Alexander Blok" (with soprano Lucy Shelton as the soloist in the last two). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Jan. 28 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Benjamin Bagby—Performing the first quarter of the Anglo-Saxon epic "Beowulf," in a modern bardic presentation in which he sings, speaks, and accompanies himself on a lyre. (Clark Studio Theatre, Rose Building, seventh floor, Lincoln Center. Jan. 28-30 and Feb. 2-3 at 8. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Dvořák in Vienna—On Jan. 30, a roundtable (at 4) and a concert (at 7) focussing on Dvořák's involvement with Vienna, including performances of his "Moravian" Duets (Op. 32 and Op. 38) and his Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

Ben Heppner—The tenor performs works by Beethoven, Liszt, Strauss, and Rachmaninoff, among others; with pianist Craig Rutenberg. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 30 at 8.)

"Words and Music"—A recital of works that blend music with the spoken word, including Satie's "Sports et Divertissements" and Debussy's "Chansons de Bilitis"; with actress Claire Bloom, flutist Eugenia Zukerman, and pianist Brian Zeger. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 30 at 8.)

Roulette Turns a Score—Roulette, a hot spot of the Tribeca arts scene, celebrates its twentieth birthday with an evening uptown, including appearances by Steve Reich, Shelley Hirsch, John Zorn, Meredith Monk, and William Parker's Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 30 at 8. For information about tickets, call 219-8242.)

Thomas Quasthoff—In his New York début recital, the baritone is joined by pianist Charles Spencer to perform Schubert's "Die Winterreise." (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 31 at 2.)

Organ Recitals—Jan. 31 at 4:45: Mark W. Peterson, of Trinity Church, moves uptown for an afternoon. (St. Patrick's Cathedral, Fifth Ave. at 51st St. No tickets necessary.) . . . Jan. 31 at 5: Mollie Hall Nichols, of the Church of the Heavenly Rest, crosses the park to perform works by Bach. (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. Admission by contribution.)

William Wolfram—The pianist offers sonatas by Scriabin (his Sixth and Tenth), Prokofiev (his Eighth), and Rachmaninoff (his Second). (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 1 at 8.)

Ensemble 21—Performing chamber works by Crumb (his "Apparition"), Carter ("Changes"), Andrew Imbrie, David Rakowski, Beth Wiemann, and Ursula Mamlok. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Feb. 1 at 8.)

"One Touch of Weill at Weill"—Excerpts from Weill's Broadway scores, including "One Touch of Venus," "Lady in the Dark," "Love Life," and "Street Scene"; with soprano Angelina Réaux, mezzo-soprano Joanna Simon, tenor Michael DeVries, baritone Kurt Ollmann, and pianist Scott Dunn. (Weill Recital Hall. Feb. 1 and Feb. 3 at 8.)

Cosmopolitan Chamber Players—With cellist Nathaniel Rosen and pianist Richard Kogan, performing works by Vivaldi, Beethoven, and Messiaen (his "Quartet for the End of Time"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Feb. 2 at 8.)

Naoko Shimizu—Performing viola sonatas by Brahms (his Second) and Hindemith (his Op. 11, No. 4), in addition to pieces by Kenji Bunch, Enesco, and Penderecki; with pianist Özgur Aydin. Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Feb. 2 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

EXCURSIONS

Winter Pleasures—On a recent afternoon on a snow-covered lane, two bearded men waved from the window of their pickup truck as they drove past a lone hiker. Tiny flakes, caught in a gusting northeasterly wind, swirled in the gray January sky. On the far side of brown-grass-covered dunes, the dark-green North Atlantic pounded the beach. No one was around; the only sounds came from the surf and the wind. This wasn't Maine or New Hampshire; it was the wilds of Fort Tilden, on Rockaway Point, along the southern reaches of New York City.

The trip out there from Manhattan takes a good hour, and it's hard to believe that the crowded No. 2 train and the slow-moving Q35 bus—which runs down Flatbush Avenue past such establishments as the Brooklyn House of Carpet, the Samson and Delilah Hair Salon, and the For Goodness Steak restaurant—can deliver one to a patch of wilderness where so much fallen snow lies undisturbed. But a Metrocard is all it takes, and when the next cameo snowstorm obscures any glimpse of Manhattan's towers it will be possible to walk along the Rockaway beach, stepping through endless clumps of blue-black mussels dislodged from the ocean floor by the passing storm, and feel blissfully removed from the hissing radiators and banging pipes a world away.

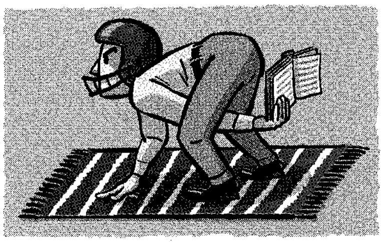
•

Readings—Jan. 27 at 6:30: By actors Beverly D'Angelo, Michael Keck, and John Shea, from the short stories of Nico Orengo, Amy Bloom, and D. H. Lawrence. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 7: By Patricia Powell, from her novel "The Pagoda," and by Shay Youngblood, from her novel "Soul Kiss." (A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 2: By poet Marie Howe, from the poetry of her longtime friend Jane Kenyon. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. For reservations, which are required, call 718-549-3200, ext. 308.)

Talks—Jan. 30 at 2: Historians Evan Cornog and Edward L. Widmer discuss, respectively, DeWitt Clinton and the birth of democracy in New York City. (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400.) . . . ¶ Feb. 1 at 7:30: Andrzej Zawada describes what it's like to climb Mt. Everest in the winter. (The Explorers Club, 46 E. 70th St. Tickets at the door.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Off the Gridiron



Given all the buildup to the Jets' recent ill-fated rendezvous with the Denver Broncos, one can only imagine the pitch of excitement that would have accompanied the New York team's trip to the Super Bowl. No fans have waited as long or as patiently for a reason to celebrate as Jets supporters have. In his recent history of the franchise, **Gang Green** (Simon & Schuster), Gerald Eskenazi catalogues the often excruciating missteps that have made the Jets at times the worst team in the game. He quotes his friend and fellow-fan Rabbi Myron Fenster on being a Jets fanatic: "It's good for the soul. It teaches you about striving and redemption, although I must admit I'm waiting for the redemption a long time."

The retired Atlanta Falcons linebacker Tim Green has turned to writing thrillers. In his fourth novel, **The Red Zone** (Warner), he draws on his experiences as both a lawyer and a footballer to tell the story of a young female attorney who defends a linebacker accused of murder and finds the case an even more complex and bloody one than she had bargained for. Former Jets quarterback Boomer Esiason's début novel, **Toss** (Dutton; written with Lowell Cauffiel), is also a thriller, this one set in the distinctly violent world of the fictional New York Stars.

Elwood Reid mined his experience in college football for his first novel, **If I Don't Six** (Doubleday), about a young player (also called Elwood) on a football scholarship who comes to hate everything about the game but knows that his education depends on it. Smart, cynical, and headstrong—Holden Caulfield in pads—Elwood is sickened by the brutality of the game and the sadism of its coaches. The way the game takes over men's lives is the subject of wry comment in Nanci Kincaid's recent novel, **Balls** (Algonquin), which tells the story of a college coach and the team he loves, from the point of view of the women who love them. Kincaid is familiar with the frustrations of "football widows," having been married to a college coach for twenty-three years. (They split up in 1992.) She recently remarried another college football coach, exhibiting a perseverance beyond that of the most diehard Jets fan.

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

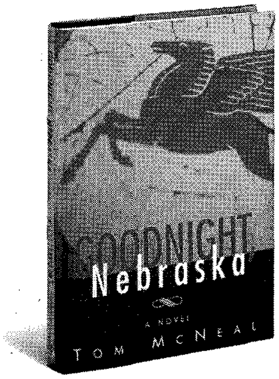
DISCOVER

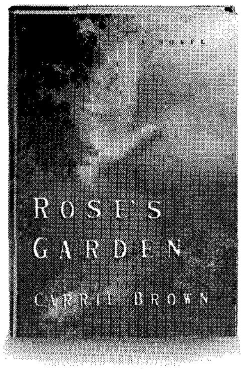
GREAT•NEW•WRITERS

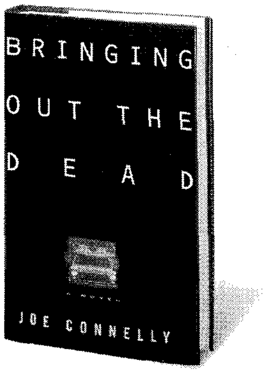
The Next Wave of Great Literary Voices

The Discover Great New Writers Award Shortlist

The *Discover Great New Writers Award* was created in 1993 to celebrate the work of a first-time novelist featured in the *Discover Great New Writers* program. Selected by a jury panel of three distinguished authors, the annual award carries a cash prize of $10,000. The 1998 award is being judged by Sandra Benitez, author of *A Place Where the Sea Remembers* and *Bitter Grounds*, who was herself the first winner of the *Discover Award*; Katharine Weber, author of *Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* and the upcoming novel *The Music Lesson*; and Oscar Hijuelos, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* and the upcoming *Empress of the Splendid Season*. For the first time in the *Discover Award*'s six-year history, we are pleased to offer a shortlist for the award, represented by the following three books selected from a field of thirty-eight first novels by American authors.







GOODNIGHT, NEBRASKA	**ROSE'S GARDEN**	**BRINGING OUT THE DEAD**
by Tom McNeal	by Carrie Brown	by Joe Connelly

Watch for the upcoming announcement of the *Discover Award* winner.

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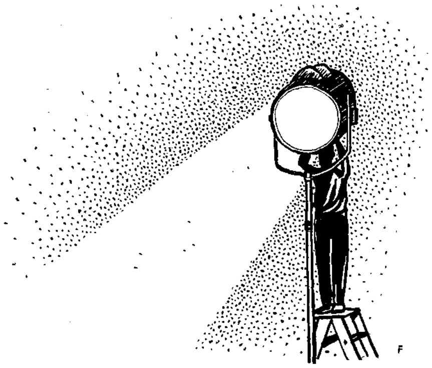


THE MOVIES

OPENING

THE JEWS IN THE LOTUS—Laurel Chiten's documentary about a meeting, in 1990, between the Dalai Lama and Jewish religious leaders. Opening Jan. 29. (Cinema Village.)

SHE'S ALL THAT—A romantic comedy about a popular Los Angeles high-school senior (Freddie Prinze, Jr.) who bets that he can transform the class nonconformist (Rachel Leigh Cook) into a prom queen. Directed by Robert Iscove. Opening Jan. 29. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

THE 24 HOUR WOMAN—A comedy about a working mother, starring Rosie Perez. Directed by Nancy Savoca. Opening Jan. 29. (Union Square.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

AFFLICTION—Nick Nolte, committing himself to a difficult part with a manly readiness that inspires affection, even awe, is Wade Whitehouse, a divorced policeman and hired hand floundering badly in a snowbound New Hampshire town. Both kindly and belligerent, Wade misses the meaning and rhythm of events, and reacts too much or too little, erupting in anger over what he should laugh off, ridiculing what he should take seriously. Writer-director Paul Schrader flinches at nothing and takes us deep into the texture and causes of this man's failure. With James Coburn as Wade's horrifying father, Willem Dafoe as his brother, Sissy Spacek as his girlfriend, and Mary Beth Hurt as his ex-wife. Schrader adapted Russell Banks's 1989 novel himself.—*David Denby* (1/11/99) (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.)

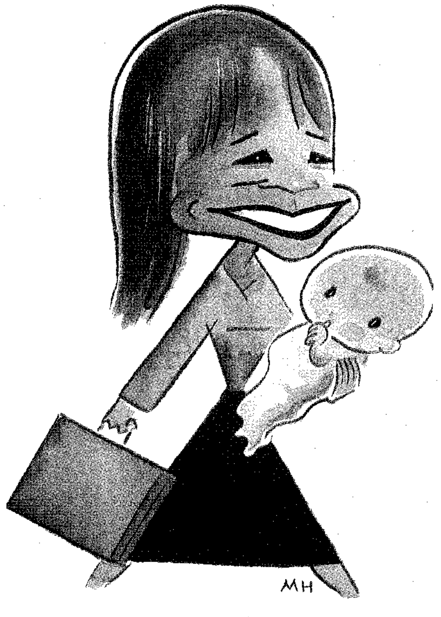
ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE—A scabrous little gangsters-on-the-road movie in which an older couple (James Woods and Melanie Griffith) adopt two junkie teens (Vincent Kartheiser and Natasha Gregson Wagner) and teach them how to pull off a heist and take a bullet. The movie doesn't go anywhere new, and director Larry Clark's obsession with teen lust (he made "Kids") is a little creepy, but Woods, as the paranoid loser Mel, is in fine, snarling form. Woods's flashing-knife delivery—his impatience and decisiveness—shapes the narrative even when Clark would obviously prefer the film to fall into an erotic-druggy trance. (There are repeated, overlong shots of the actors inserting needles into their arms, thighs, and necks; you are permitted to look away.)—*D.D.* (1/25/99) (Angelika Film Center.)

A CIVIL ACTION—Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta), a flashy Boston ambulance chaser, gets caught up in a working-class town's battle with two large corporations that may have polluted its water and caused several deaths. Obsessed, Schlichtmann loses his professional judgment and sacrifices everything to the case. That the story is true (and based on an expertly written book by Jonathan Harr) doesn't make the film any more satisfying dramatically—there's a streak of obviousness in the moral melodrama that dampens one's interest. Written and directed by Steven Zaillian.—*D.D.* (1/11/99) (Cinema I, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

DOGFIGHT (1991)—A crumbly slice of life set in the precountercultural Dark Ages. It's November, 1963: River Phoenix is a marine stopping over in San Francisco before shipping out to Okinawa and Vietnam; Lili Taylor is a prematurely dowdy yet spiritually beautiful girl who worships Joan Baez and Odetta and waits tables at her mom's café. First, he takes her to a "dogfight"—a contest in which the ugliest date wins. Then he tries to make up for it with a swell dinner. Sure enough, as this odd couple roams through North Beach they touch each other in unexpected ways. Phoenix brings out the confusion and vulnerability beneath his hard-guy poses, and Taylor has an arsenal of covert smiles and furry half-tones. But nineties attitudes toward the period overdetermine their characters. The director, Nancy Savoca, and the writer, Robert Comfort, sentimentalize her and crucify him.—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Jan. 30.)

THE EAGLE WITH TWO HEADS (1948)—The structure is similar to that of "Beauty and the Beast" but with inversions—this time it is the Queen (Edwige Feuillère) who is awakened from her trance by the revolutionary poet (Jean Marais), who has come to assassinate her. And, while the Beast addressed Beauty with only a few simple words, here the Queen dunks her Angel of Death in a torrent of elegant language. This is a sweepingly romantic picture—a beautiful trifle. Jean Cocteau adapted his own play, and directed. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Florence Gould Hall; Feb. 2.)

ELIZABETH—A grisly, flamboyant account of the Virgin Queen's early days as a monarch. Screenwriter Michael Hirst alters and conflates events that took place over many years—by degrees, Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), a Protestant surrounded by powerful Catholics, takes control of England by pulling off a kind of internal coup d'état. The means of her ascension is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a perfect Machiavellian character who serves the Queen as adviser, deadly assassin, and spy. Elizabeth's climb to power, however, is a personal disaster: the supple-waisted maiden with long red hair



Opening Jan. 26, Rosie Perez in Nancy Savoca's "The 24 Hour Woman."

becomes stiff and harsh, emerging from her youth white-faced and trapped in the armor of a thick brocade dress. The movie is a horror film masquerading as a historical pageant. Directed by Shekhar Kapur.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Regency, and Waverly.)

The Faculty—When he gets into a rhythm, Robert Rodriguez is a real pulp artist; when he falls out of rhythm, he tends to overindulge in showy special effects and pointless, juvenile misogyny. Working in both modes here, he brings us the story of alien parasites that have invaded the bodies of the teachers at an Ohio high school, and the six kids (a grab bag of cheerleaders and misfits, led by Elijah Wood as a lonely nerd) who try to stop them. Rodriguez's zippy editing style makes the first half of this film both giddier and more dreadful than the usual teen slasher flick. But he gets distracted by all the twists and turns, and fails to go in for the kill. The screenplay is by Kevin Williamson, who also wrote "Scream."—*Sarah Kerr* (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

The General—John Boorman's deadpan-cool celebration of the Irish thief and populist hero Martin Cahill, who died in 1994. As embodied by the great Irish actor Brendan Gleeson, Cahill may be the least glamorous gangster in motion-picture history. Gleeson has a thick neck, a massive forehead and jowls, and a large doughy body. Moving along Dublin's streets with the hood of his jacket pulled over his head, he might be an animated potato sack, or perhaps some creature—a hedgehog or beaver—concentrating on the terrain. Cahill is in fact a criminal genius and a fantastically aggressive personality. He always defeats expectations (even in death), and so does the movie. With Jon Voight as the Dublin police inspector who lacks the sense of humor to understand what Cahill is up to. In black-and-white.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

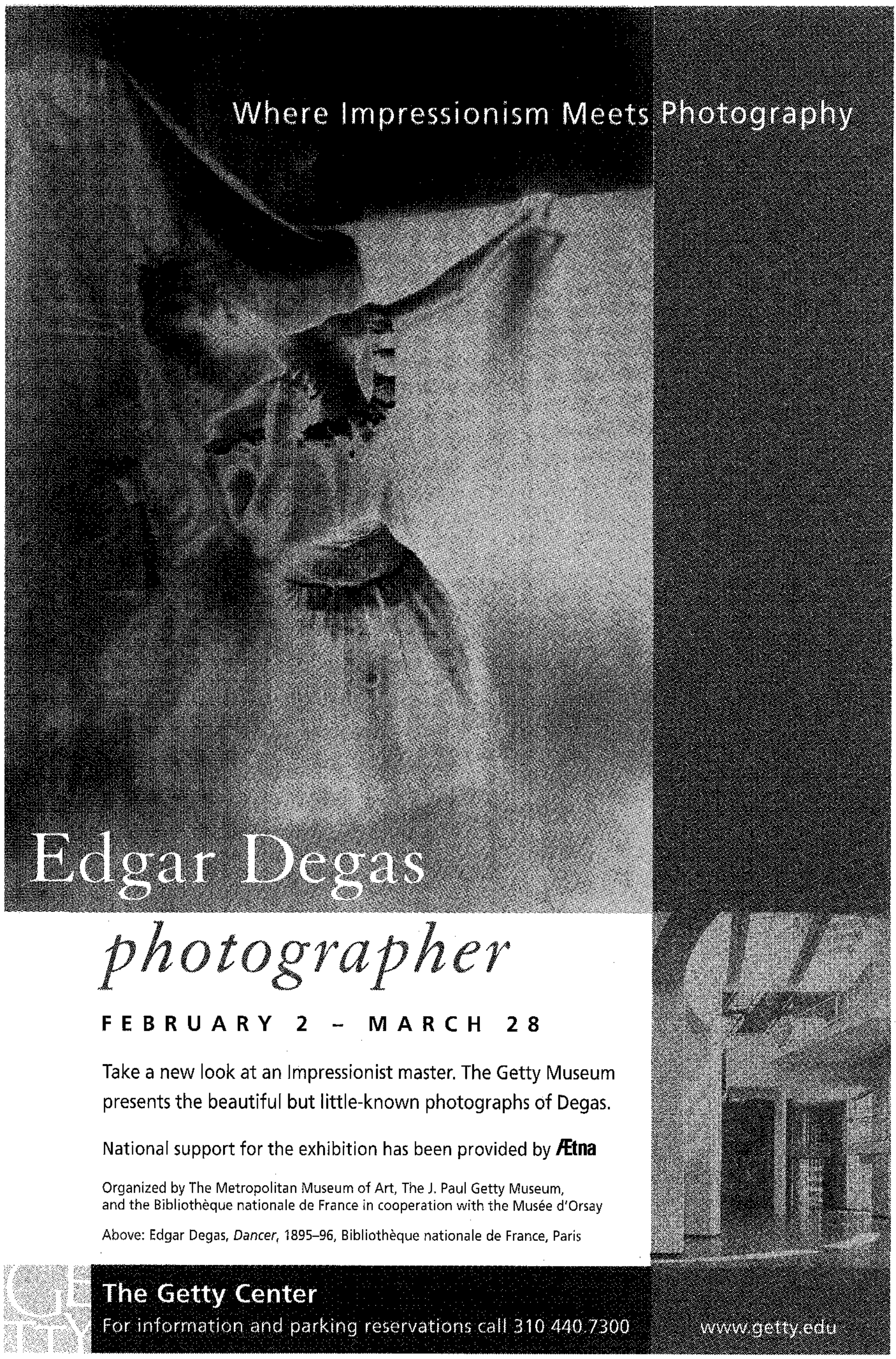
Gods and Monsters—In the nineteen-fifties, the British-born director James Whale, who had lent depth and dignity to the horror film with "Frankenstein" and "Bride of Frankenstein," idled away his time, all but forgotten by the movie industry, in Pacific Palisades, California; eventually, he drowned in his pool. Bill Condon's elegant and tactful picture, based on Christopher Bram's novel "Father of Frankenstein," speculates on what might have happened in those final days. The inquiry draws fine performances from Ian McKellen as the dandyish Whale and from Brendan Fraser as his (wholly fictitious) gardener, Clayton Boone, with whom the older man becomes obsessed. With Lynn Redgrave as a Puritan housekeeper.—*Anthony Lane* (11/9/98) (59th Street East Cinema, Quad Cinema, and 64th and 2nd.)

Hilary and Jackie—Anand Tucker's film takes us through the politely fraught story of the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister Hilary. We see them first as young girls, and follow their rivalry; Hilary, the sensible flutist, is gradually outstripped by her more impassioned sister. The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale, in which the now famous Jackie (Emily Watson) starts up a rural threesome with Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Hilary's husband, Kiffer Finzi (David Morrissey), feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music. The whole picture, indeed, is more likely to gratify the emotionally prurient than to appease lovers of Beethoven and Elgar; that is certainly the effect of Watson's strains and strivings, and you feel grateful whenever Griffiths and Morrissey (both excellent) manage to calm her down. With Celia Imrie as the girls' tireless mother, and James Frain as Daniel Barenboim.—*A.L.* (1/18/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Hurlyburly—Hollywood lowlifes awash in cynicism, drugs, desperation, and peculiarly elaborate pedantry about minor verbal distinctions in the absence of genuine feeling about anything. What seemed shocking onstage fifteen years ago in David Rabe's play now seems rancid and rather meaningless, though it's still funny. With Sean Penn, particularly good as the unloved scuzzbag, Eddie, Chazz Palminteri as a psychopathic actor, Kevin Spacey doing his affectless thing, Robin Wright Penn, Meg Ryan, Anna Paquin, and Garry Shandling. Rabe adapted his own play. Directed by Anthony Drazan.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Life Is Beautiful—Would that it were. The great, donkey-faced Italian clown Roberto Benigni attempts an ambitious fable of comedy's redemptive power. He plays an Italian Jew who keeps alive his little boy's innocence in a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the routines of the camp are no more than an intricate game staged for his son's benefit. But Benigni's ironic counter-reality undermines this movie, not the Nazis, who were beyond ridicule for the same reason that they were beyond rationality. Totalitarianism makes the fantastic literal—that is its demonic appeal. Benigni's jokes and games just aren't enough, and you leave the movie thinking that what's touching is not Benigni's ministrations to the little boy but his own need to believe in comedy as salvation. With Giorgio Cantarini, who has the heartbreaking quality of the children in the old neorealist movies, as the boy. In Italian.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962)—The reputation of this John Ford Western is undeservedly high: it's a heavy-spirited piece of nostalgia. John Wayne is in his flamboyant element, but James Stewart is too old for the role of an idealistic young Eastern lawyer who is robbed on the way west, goes to work in the town of Shinbone as a dishwasher, and learns about Western life. There's not much of the outdoors; the action



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Above: Edgar Degas, *Dancer*, 1895–96, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

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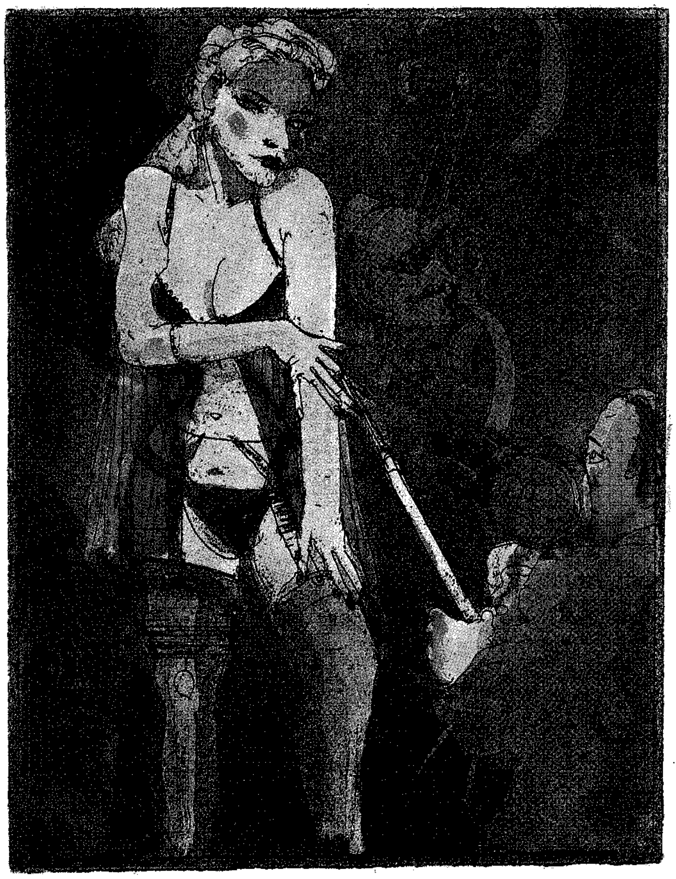
takes place mainly in Shinbone, and even a stagecoach robbery was filmed on a sound stage.—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 29.)

My Name Is Joe—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Patch Adams—Embarrassing rubbish about a medical student (Robin Williams) who rebels against med-school routines and cuts a hole in red enema bulbs and places them on his nose in order to cheer up patients, including young children with cancer. The clowning is alleged to make a serious difference in the patients' health. Written by Steve Oedekerk and directed by Tom Shadyac (both onetime Jim Carrey collaborators), this shameless piece of sentimentality is indignantly on the side of feelings and spontaneity and against coldhearted technique, as if those were the only two choices in training doctors. Based on a memoir by Hunter Doherty Adams, a genuine doctor who, an end title informs us, runs an organization in West Virginia, devoted to free treatment and loving care, called the Gesundheit Institute.—*D.D.* (1/25/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, Union Square, and Waverly.)

Peeping Tom (1960)—There's never been a psycho thriller as insidiously repellent as Michael Powell's portrait of a would-be director who is a serial killer. Carl Boehm is the title creep, a focus-puller at a London movie studio who moonlights as a pornographic still-photographer and spends his spare time shooting a documentary about murder, starring his victims. Boehm's father, played by Powell, was a celebrated biologist who wanted to chart every stage of human development and specialized in "fear and the nervous system." While using a 16-mm. camera to document his son's growth, he went to fantastic extremes, even scaring him awake with a lizard so he could study the boy's hysterical reaction. Boehm extends this line of research: he turns the third leg of his tripod into a bayonet, and films his female targets as they die in a state of excruciating fright. The movie has its witty moments—a shrink notes that Boehm "has his father's eyes"—but "Peeping Tom" isn't a black comedy. It's an obsessive-compulsive nightmare.—*M.S.* (Film Forum 2; starting Jan. 29.)



At Film Forum 2, Michael Powell's "Peeping Tom."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Playing by Heart—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, 72nd Street East, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Prince of Egypt—The story of Moses, in a big, blustery, chest-beating animated feature from DreamWorks. The idea is presumably to trump Disney at its own game; the method, more bizarrely, is to trump Cecil B. De Mille at *his* own game. The speaking cast is absurdly strong, led by Val Kilmer as Moses, and including Danny Glover, Ralph Fiennes, Jeff Goldblum, Sandra Bullock, Patrick Stewart, and Michelle Pfeiffer.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, 59th Street East Cinema, Lincoln Square, State, and Union Square.)

The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (1970)—Billy Wilder's detective picture is meant to be a put-on of the Sherlock Holmes mythology, concentrating on a case that Holmes (Robert Stephens) fouls up because he's distracted by the treachery of a smart charmer (Geneviève Page). But for this idea to have bounce and suspense we need to see the clues and draw our own inferences, so that we can enjoy Holmes's mistakes. And for it to be somewhat romantic, as it's intended to be, we need to see much more of how the woman deceives him. Instead, one must content oneself with the occasional archly amusing line, the handsome Victorian décor, and Christopher Challis's lovely (if somewhat dark) cinematography. It's a graceful picture, but it dawdles, and Stephens doesn't have the star presence that Holmes requires.—*P.K.* (A Different Light Bookstore; Jan. 31.)

Shakespeare in Love—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)

A Simple Plan—Sam Raimi's sturdy attempt to do a contemporary, snowbound "Treasure of the Sierra Madre." Three ordinary guys—a married college man who has settled into a routine job (Bill Paxton), his slightly woolly-brained brother (Billy Bob Thornton), and the town drunk and screwup (Brent Briscoe)—discover $4.4 million in a downed airplane lodged in the snow. What to do with the cash? The picture becomes a study of the nasty effects of greed and of the weakness of civilization's bonds.—*D.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Stepmom—A wealthy lawyer (Ed Harris) leaves his wife (Susan Sarandon) for a young photographer (Julia Roberts). Needless to say, his kids (Jena Malone and Liam Aiken) don't like the idea: they resent the presence of the interloper, who spends the rest of the movie trying to win them over. Just to complicate the issue, the wife learns that she has terminal cancer. Sarandon and Harris do their best with director Chris Columbus's slow, nervous pace and with a script that is itself incurable. Poor Julia Roberts is forced to indicate her photographic prowess by announcing "It's a wrap" at regular intervals; it's that kind of movie.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Thin Red Line—Terrence Malick's first film in twenty years is about a company of American troops at Guadalcanal. What happens, in essence, is that they come ashore and take an enemy-held hill; somehow, Malick, who was never a man to be hurried, spins this simple action out to nearly three hours. The cast includes Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Elias Koteas, John Savage, Woody Harrelson, George Clooney, and John Travolta, with strong performances from younger actors like Ben Chaplin and Jim Caviezel, but they all drift in and out of the action, never staying long enough to hold center stage. Malick seems to like his characters lonely—they talk to themselves in voice-over but rarely connect with other men. The result is a ravishingly strange mess: part bloody action movie, part pantheistic trip.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

The Winners—From Holland, an extraordinarily poignant where-are-they-now documentary about four past winners of a prestigious international musical competition who went on to good but not first-rate careers. One Russian pianist fell afoul of Soviet authorities; another Russian, a violinist, played so close to perfection that it shattered his fragile nerves. The message of the film is that genius alone is not enough—often it's the near-geniuses, those able to function in the world, who are most successful. A little luck helps, too. Directed by Paul Cohen; written by Cohen and David van Tijn. In English, French, Russian, and Flemish.—*S.K.* (Film Forum.)

You've Got Mail—A regrouping of the team that brought you "Sleepless in Seattle"—director Nora Ephron and leading players Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Once again, the story hinges on a couple who know each other for real only in the final minute—in this case, Joe Fox, who owns a chain of large bookstores, and Kathleen Kelly, who runs one small bookstore and finds herself put out of business. They meet and dislike each other without realizing that they've been waging a little light flirtation, under appropriate pseudonyms, via E-mail. The movie is sweetly undemanding, as you might expect, but the romantic suspense is zilch, and, compared with Ernst Lubitsch's "The Shop Around the Corner," on which Ephron based her script, everything feels spineless and slack.—*A.L.* (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

AT FIRST SIGHT: Chelsea West, Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THE CELEBRATION:** 62nd & Broadway and The Screening Room. . . . **CENTRAL STATION** (reviewed in our issue of 11/30/98): BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema. . . . **THE CHILDREN OF HEAVEN:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **DR. AKAGI:** Quad Cinema. . . . **GLORIA:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **HAPPINESS** (10/19/98): Gotham Cinema and Village East Cinemas. . . . **IN DREAMS:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **LITTLE VOICE:** Beekman and Union Square. . . . **PSYCHO:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **RUSH HOUR:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **STEAM: THE TURKISH BATH:** Quad Cinema. . . . **STILL CRAZY:** Lincoln Square. . . . **THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **VARSITY BLUES:** East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **VIRUS:** Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Cinemas. . . . **WAKING NED DEVINE:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-623-2770.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**THEATRE 2:** Through Jan. 28 "Mississippi Mermaid" (1969, François Truffaut; in French). . . . From Jan. 29: "Peeping Tom" (†). . . . **THEATRE 3:** "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films directed by Robert Bresson; in French, with English subtitles. Jan. 28 at 2:30: "Mouchette" (1967). . . . Jan. 28 at 6, Jan. 30 at 3, and Feb. 1 at 2:30: "The Trial of Joan of Arc" (1962). . . . Jan. 29 at 2:30: "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne" (1945). . . . Jan. 29 at 6 and Jan. 31 at 5: "Pickpocket" (1959). . . . Jan. 30 at 1 and Jan. 31 at 2: "A Man Escaped" (1956). . . . Jan. 30 at 5 and Feb. 2 at 6: "A Gentle Creature" (1969). . . . Feb. 1 at 6 and Feb. 2 at 2:30: "Balthazar" (1966). . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 6: "The Dancing Soul of the Walking People" (1978, Paula Gladstone). . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 6:30 and Jan. 29 at 3: "Paulina" (1998, Vicky Funari and Jennifer Maytorena). . . . ¶ Jan. 29 at 6 and 7: "Lee Marvin: A Personal Portrait by John Boorman" (1998, Boorman). . . . ¶ Jan. 29 at 8: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (†). . . . ¶ Jan. 29 at 8:15: "Hell in the Pacific" (1968, Boorman). . . . ¶ Jan. 30-31 at 2:30: "Barrabas" (1919, Louis Feuillade; French intertitles, with simultaneous live English translation). The twelve-part film, which totals seven and a half hours, will be shown in two parts.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Jan 27: The Eighth Annual New York Jewish Film Festival. . . . From Jan. 29: A program of films from Cuba.

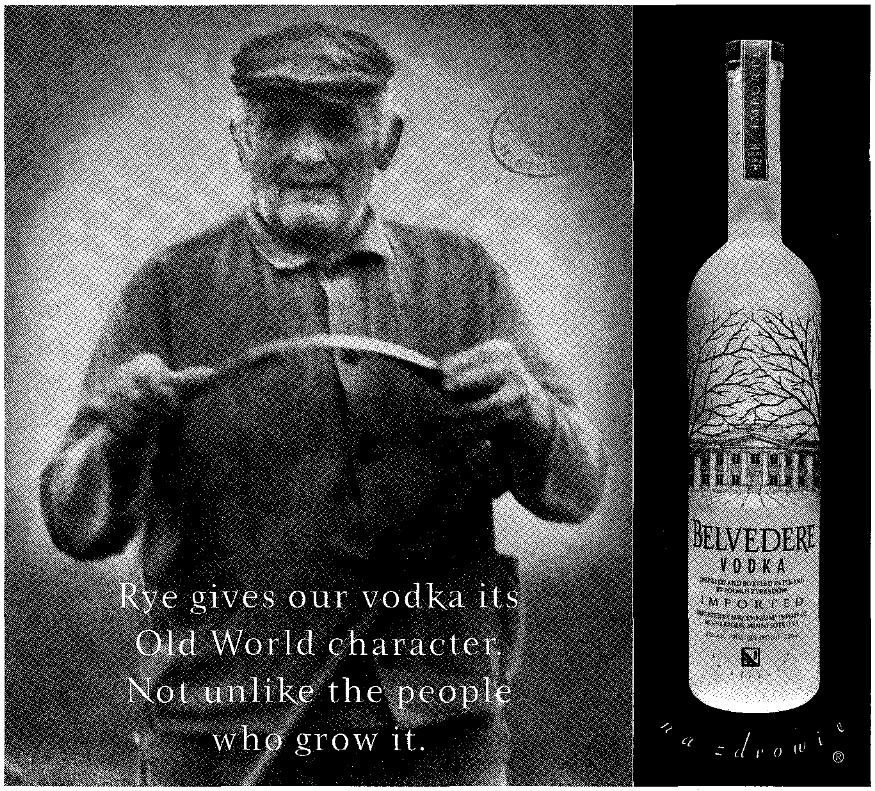
American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Nancy Savoca. Jan. 30 at 2: "True Love" (1989). . . . Jan. 30 at 4: "Dogfight" (†). . . . Jan. 30 at 6: "If These Walls Could Talk" (1996; an HBO film). . . . Jan. 31 at 2: "Household Saints" (1993). . . . Jan. 31 at 4:30: "The 24 Hour Woman" (1999). Ms. Savoca will be present.

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. (718-623-2770)—"The Feminine Eye: Twenty Years of Women's Cinema." Jan. 29 at 4: "Angry Harvest" (1985, Agnieszka Holland; West Germany). . . . Jan. 29 at 6: "The Hour of the Star" (1985, Suzana Amaral; Brazil). . . . Jan. 29 at 8:15: "The Murmuring" (1995, Byun Young-joo; Korea). . . . Jan. 30 at noon: "Histoires d'Amerique" (1989, Chantal Akerman; Belgium and France). . . . Jan. 30 at 4: "Silences of the Palace" (1994, Moufida Tlatli; France and Tunisia). . . . Jan. 30 at 6:45: "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (1992, Fran Rubel Kuzui; United States). . . . Jan. 30 at 8:45: "Rosa Luxemburg" (1987, Margarethe Von Trotta; Germany). . . . Jan. 31 at noon: "Sweetie" (1989, Jane Campion; Australia). . . . Jan. 31 at 4: "Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia" (1989, Ulrike Ottinger; Germany). . . . Jan. 31 at 8:15: "Chocolat" (1988, Claire Denis; France and West Germany).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Feb. 2 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Eagle with Two Heads" (†).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Jan. 31 at 7, the feature will be "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Jan. 27 at 6 and 8; Jan. 28 at 4, 6, and 8; Jan. 29 at 6 and 8; Jan. 30 at 3 and 4:45; Jan. 31 at 3, 5, and 7:15; Feb. 1 at 6 and 8; and Feb. 2 at 4 and 6:30: "My Knees Were Jumping: Remembering the Kindertransport" (1996, Melissa Hacker). . . . Jan. 28 at 9:30, Jan. 30 at 7:30, and Jan. 31 at 8:30: Films by Sergei Eisenstein.



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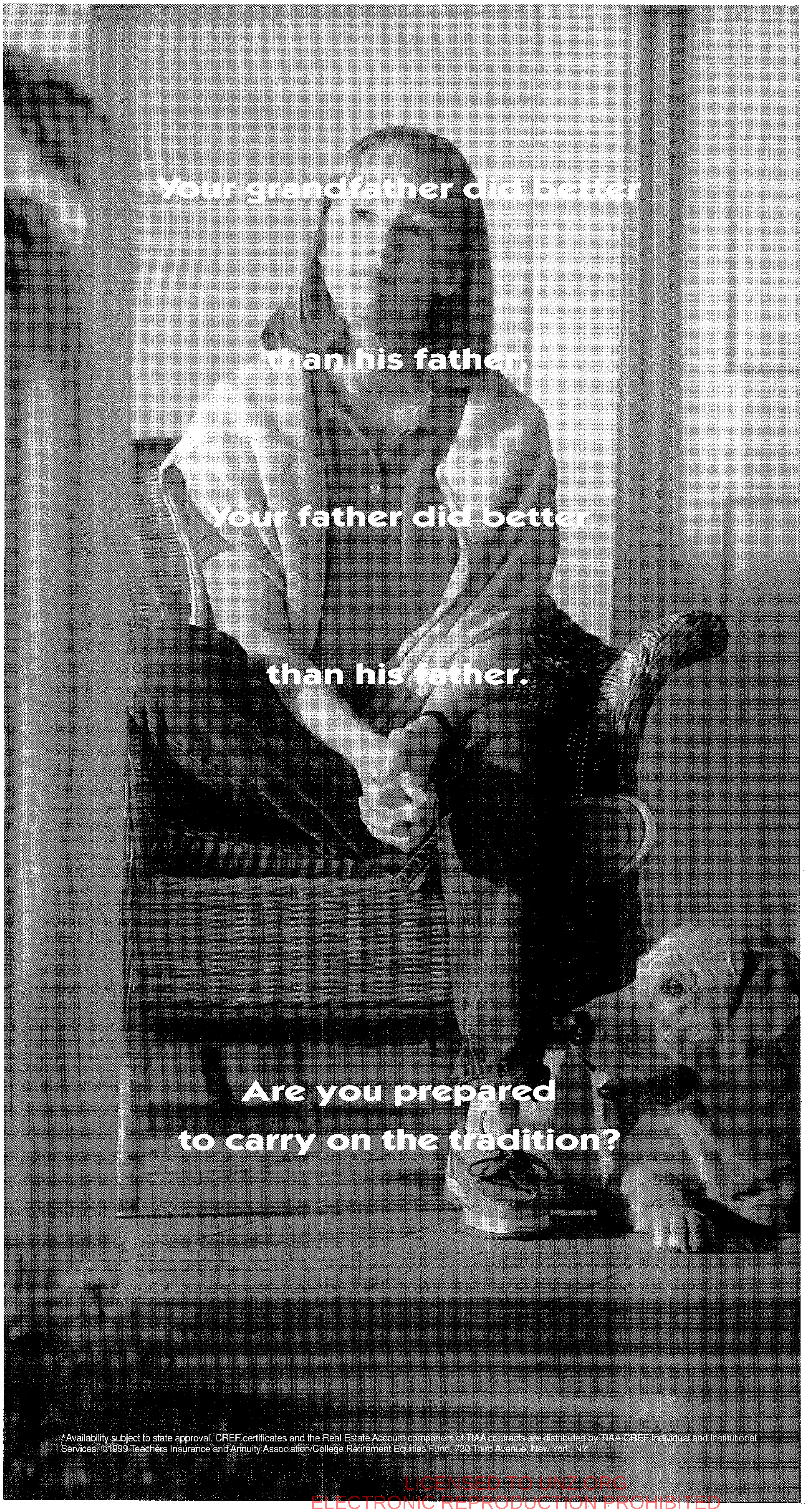
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Next year's State of the Union.

MY fellow-Americans, in case you hadn't noticed, I'm getting old. I'm only fifty-three, but my bones ache; I can't read without glasses or listen to the radio without my hearing aid; my knee is shot. Like many baby boomers, I'm already thinking about retiring to someplace warm, where I can get some rest and work on reducing my fourteen handicap. (The problem is my wife. She's seriously thinking of moving to New York.) Of course, before that great day comes I'll have to earn some serious dough—follow my old foursomes partner Gerald Ford out onto the mashed-potato circuit and entertain groups of upholstery salesmen with my stories of sparring with Newt Gingrich (remember him?), skating through an impeachment trial, and saving Social Security.

Saving Social Security—you don't recall? The thing that rescued my place in history. One minute, all those talking heads and newspaper prognosticators were going on about Monica Lewinsky and comparing me to Andrew Johnson and Nixon (who, by the way, wasn't all bad—check out the speech I gave at his funeral). The next minute, I'm up there with Teddy Roosevelt, F.D.R., and Lyndon Johnson in the pantheon of great domestic-policy Presidents. "The scoundrel who preserved the New Deal legacy"—that's what they called me in the Washington *Post*. Not a bad epitaph for a guy who looked like he was going to be run out of town with his pants around his ankles. I'll get Vernon to have it put on a plaque and hung over the front door of the condo we share down in Palm Beach Gardens.

How did I turn things around, you ask? Good question. As far as I can figure, it all goes back to a meeting we had in Arkansas in January of 1993, just after I was elected. The room was full of economists and policy experts from Harvard, M.I.T., Princeton. You name it, they were there. We had a big discussion about whether we should spend more money to get the economy moving or spend less money to reduce the budget deficit that Ronald Reagan and George Bush had left us. As you know, I'm a lawyer, not an economist, and, to be honest, I didn't know what to do. In the end, I decided to take Deep Throat's advice and follow the money. The money was Bob Rubin, and he said we should cut the deficit. If we did this, Bob promised, his chums on Wall Street would bid up the price of government bonds, thereby reducing long-term interest rates, and Alan Greenspan would cut short-term rates. With lower rates, businesses would invest, the economy would expand, tax revenues would rise, and we'd end up with more money to spend on things like Medicare, education, and Social Security. I didn't quite believe it, but Bob's a persuasive fellow, and, what do you know? It worked. I woke up one morning in 1998 and the budget was balanced, the unemployment rate was at its lowest since the Beatles broke up, the Dow was heading for ten thousand, and the Congressional Budget Office was forecasting big budget surpluses for the foreseeable future.

That story didn't get much play at the time, what with Monica and Ken Starr on the front pages. But I knew then that I was home free. I got Gene Sperling and the boys on the National Economic Council to run the numbers, and it was true: four trillion dollars in projected budget surpluses between 2000 and 2015. Bingo. There was going to be so much money sloshing around that I could save Social Security without raising taxes or cutting benefits. (Hell, I could even raise benefits a bit. I abolished the earnings limit for retirees and gave widows a better deal.) And not only that. I could also save Medicare, introduce subsidized savings accounts, and give tax breaks to folks who take care of their sick grandmas. After last year's address, I wasn't Slick Willy anymore—I was Santa Claus. I gave more money to schools, the inner cities, farmers, exporters, environmentalists, police de-

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN KATCHOR

partments—even missile manufacturers. You should have seen Tom DeLay's face when he heard that one. Pat Robertson popped up the next day and said I had the Republicans by the short and curlies. Did I have fun reading that story.

Of course, not everything's perfect these days. Some people are poor, Amazon.com is no longer rising twenty dollars a day, Saddam is still in Baghdad, and sometime soon I'm going to have to look at a map and find out where Kosovo is. But I think you'll agree that I've earned my place in history. God bless America. —JOHN CASSIDY

THE BOARDS

The things that haunt Harold Pinter.

HAROLD PINTER, the spirited English author of twenty-eight spirited plays (the *Times Literary Supplement* has called him "the most influential and important craftsman in English theatre"), flew in from his London home the other day for a quick look at two of his plays in rehearsal—"Ashes to Ashes" and "The Hothouse," both of which are to open this month, the first at the Gramercy, the other at the Atlantic.

"Both of these plays mean a good deal to me," Pinter said as we were being driven in a car to the Gramercy at the peak of a fierce snowstorm. Blowing sleet obscured the car's windshield. The driver looked grim. Pinter didn't seem to notice. He looked out the window briefly, mentioning that he and his wife, the writer Antonia Fraser, hoped to be able to leave their hotel at four-thirty the next morning to make a plane to Barbados.

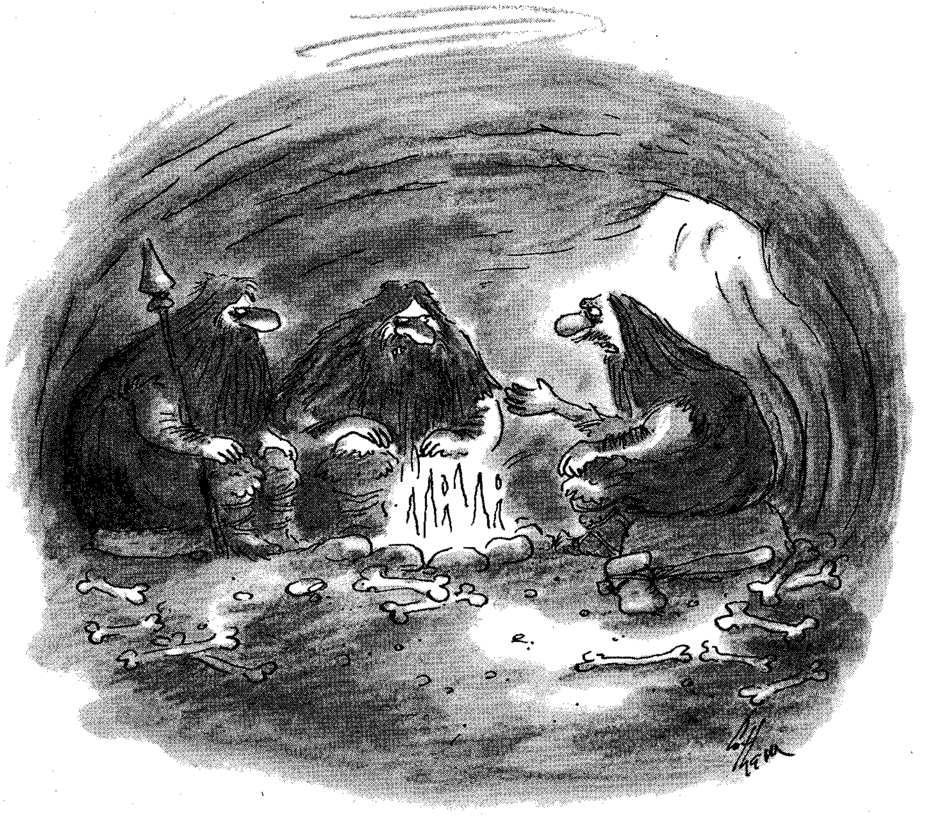
As our car crunched slowly over the icy street, Pinter said calmly enough, but firmly, "'Ashes to Ashes' is about torturers and victims. The woman in this two-character play is haunted. And so am I. *I'm* haunted. I'm haunted by barbaric acts around me. 'The Hothouse' is about the idiocy and savagery of people in power. Wherever I go, I'm haunted by it."

Pinter had just been to Princeton, where he gave a lecture before an overflow crowd of several hundred. "I don't lecture," he said. "So I read from six of my plays, playing all the parts. Then I answered questions. I wasn't going to say anything political gratuitously. But, as soon as someone asked what I thought of the Labour Government in England, I went for it. I said I was against bombing Iraq. I said I was against killing innocent people. I said that when Clinton became President he bombed Baghdad. It was a machismo thing. He managed to kill a woman a friend of mine knew, a woman who ran a beautiful art gallery—and her children, too. He killed people. These people are dead. They may have been forgotten by some, but I never forget anything."

Pinter looked very much the same as he had in 1967, when he was here with his twelfth play, "The Homecoming." In these pages I described him then, at thirty-six, as handsome, amiable-looking, with black hair and sideburns. He is still handsome, still amiable-looking, but a bit heavier now, and his black hair and sideburns are tinged with gray. He had on a large, loose-fitting black overcoat over a black suit and a black shirt. His voice sounds deeper now, almost Churchillian.

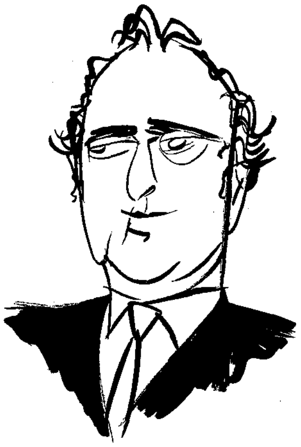
"I've changed," he said, with a friendly smile. "I always felt strongly about political abuses of power, about governments killing people. I was a conscientious objector when I was eighteen. I never stopped feeling strongly about war, about bombings. I used to be more thin-skinned, but I was always resolute. Now, though, I've put all my cards on the table."

He gave an unmistakably resolute smile. "I protest, I write letters, I speak, I'm on the picket line in front of 10 Downing Street," he said. "I don't like what Mrs. Thatcher's and Mr. Major's Government did and what Prime Minister Blair's Government is doing, what President Bush's government did and what President Clinton is doing—the bombings, the sanctions, starving people. I don't like the way the Lords have tried to stop Pinochet's extradition to Spain by claiming that one of the Lords who voted to have him extradited was linked to Amnesty International. Totally preposterous. Everyone should belong to Amnesty International! Pinochet was in power with the support of the United States. When I picket, I carry a placard read-



"The very survival of our society depends upon the just compensation of our professional athletes."

ing 'Pinochet Is a Mass Murderer.' Antonia goes with me. Tomorrow, instead of in Barbados, I'd like to be in front of 10 Downing Street, picketing. I'm not popular with any government. Mr. Major wanted to make me a knight. I thanked the Government, but I declined. I said I would not accept such recognition from a conservative Government.



Harold Pinter

"Some critics seem to think that an artist should not raise his head above the parapets," Pinter said. "I feel lucky to have the freedom to say what I feel, to say what I think. That's not a distraction from my work. That's an obligation. It *is* my work. The plays are the plays. The plays are separate. I'm me."

Pinter said that he still writes his plays, as he always has, in longhand in pen on yellow legal-pad paper, and that he is bringing home a big supply of those yellow pads, because he couldn't get them in England. He wrote "The Hothouse" in 1958. "At the time, I'd just had the première of 'The Birthday Party,' my first play. No one came. It was massacred by the critics. It came off in one week. So I didn't think anyone that year would produce 'The Hothouse.' In 1979, I made a few changes in the play, directed it, acted in it, and in 1982 brought it over here, where it had only a brief run. So this is a welcome revival."

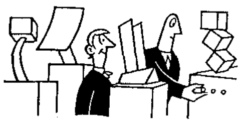
"The Hothouse" is being directed here by Karen Kohlhaas; Karel Reisz is directing "Ashes to Ashes." "The woman in 'Ashes to Ashes' is identifying with the world of violence, with the victims of abuse and violence, the dead victims," Pinter said. "They're encapsulated in this woman's sensibilities. The play is saying we're all encouraged to pretend that the killings are not happening. It's that old familiar line from the John Donne poem—'Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' 'The Hothouse,' 'The Birthday Party,' 'The Dumb Waiter' all deal with these things. But I still get a few laughs out of them. 'The Hothouse' is funny. It's about an authoritarian system. The image is a convalescent home, but actually it's a prison, a world of violence and killing.

"My parents were pleased with their boy," Pinter said, smiling. "I always remained close to my parents. They loved Antonia, and she loved them. I have a forty-one-year-old son from my first marriage, to Vivien Merchant, and I have six stepchildren with Antonia—three writers, two bankers, one barrister—and twelve grandchildren, between the ages of one and eleven. Antonia is 'Grandma,' I'm 'Grandpa.' " He grinned in a carefree and happy mode, clearly illustrative of the fact that the plays are the plays and that he is he. "My father died only last year, at ninety-six. I don't think I'll make ninety-six. I don't think I want to," he said. "Antonia and I just celebrated our twenty-fourth. We lived together for five years before we married. Every year we always celebrate."

—LILLIAN ROSS

IN THE AISLES

A postmodernist goes shopping.



MICHAEL GRAVES, the architect, used to think that a gondola was one of those long black boats that tourists like to take pictures of in Venice. That was before he signed on to design a new line of home and kitchen accessories for Target, the discount department-store chain. Now he knows that a gondola is an island of back-to-back shelves sitting in an aisle between two areas of merchandise. Starting this week, Graves will have space on several gondolas to display his products in each of the eight hundred and fifty-one Target stores.

Graves was explaining all this and other fun things he's learned about discount stores one slushy day recently as he took a break to check out the Target store in Menlo Park, New Jersey, not far from his office, in Princeton. He walked the aisles in a blue Ralph Lauren baseball cap, surveying the store's vast stocks of everything from potato chips to pillowcases. Stopping at a gondola filled with pre-Graves dishes, he picked up a set of four cobalt-blue bowls packaged in an open-fronted box ($6.99). "This is not bad," he said, obviously torn between the diplomacy required of a member of the Target team and his own designing instincts. Diplomacy won the day as Graves sped up past a display of picture frames decorated with baby shoes in bas-relief ($8.99). "I think there's always going to be that nostalgic need, but I think you could do it with greater wit," he said. He turned next to a silvery frame ($9.99) in a shape that looked like a melted valentine. "Well, these things come and go," he said. "I have learned that picture frames are a form of fashion, like sheets."

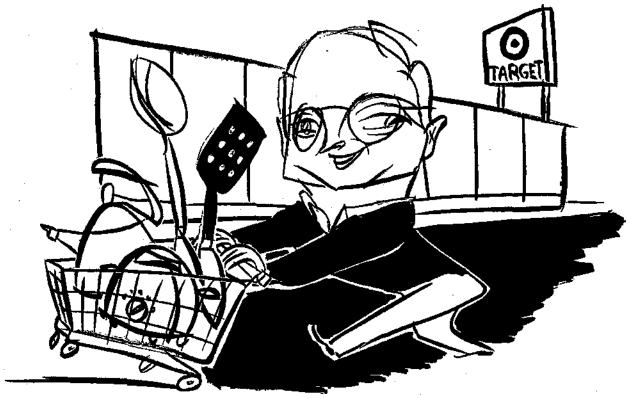
Graves has been designing household objects for years—he is particularly well known for an Alessi teakettle with a whistling bird on the spout, which retails for a hundred and forty-five dollars—but he has never cracked the low end of the market. Now that what might be called the Gap phenomenon, the trending downward of taste, has made mass-market goods more sophisticated, the time seems to have come for an internationally acclaimed architect to design $12.99 picture frames and a $39.99 toaster.

"People ask me, 'Why are you doing this?' " Graves, who is sixty-four years old, said. "I tell them, 'If I design a library in Denver, that's for the masses, so why not this sort of stuff?' "

During the visit to Target, it was easy to gauge Graves's level of approval by his walking speed—he slowed down to examine merchandise he liked, and accelerated when he was displeased, as if to make the offensive objects disappear. He practically sprinted past a frothy glass perfume bottle that looked like sugar-coated plastic ($11.99)—"There are so many great Art Deco perfume bottles they could have used as an inspiration," he said wistfully—whereas his eye was caught by a plastic laundry basket ($5.99) with aerodynamically shaped vent holes and sleek proportions. "Now, if I apply the best test, the my-house test—do I want that object in my house?—I'd have to say yes, I want that," he said.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

He moved on to a gondola piled with toasters ($9.99 to $59.99). "For me, all of these are within ten per cent of each other in looks—they're all boxes," he said. "None of them would put a smile on my face at seven-thirty in the morning." Graves's own toaster will certainly stand out. It is voluptuously rounded, with a plump blue handle, a yellow control knob, and egg-shaped gray feet—a cartoon version of a toaster.



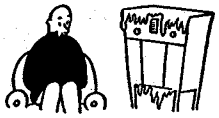
Michael Graves

His pace picked up again when he passed a gondola full of doormats, including a printed still-life ($8.99), a green mat that read "Welcome" and had three frogs on it ($13.99), and a mat adorned with fake cobblestones ($27.99). This is one department that the improved-taste culture does not seem to have reached yet. "I have to say that I've never seen one of these mats at anyone's door, but maybe it's just the doors I go into," Graves said. "I guess I'd better do a doormat next."

—PAUL GOLDBERGER

WEATHER REPORT

Warm feelings for snowy days.



THEY'VE been promising New Englanders a snowy, stormy winter, and I, for one, can't wait, as long as it's the right kind of storm. The past two winters have been drab, uneventful, blah: a puny inch of snow followed by brown slush and murky rain—and in the past month yet more dank, sunless days, skies dusk-dark from dawn to nightfall, freezing drizzle that turns driving into a game of Russian roulette. Twenty or thirty years ago, when my kids were growing up, winters in my neck of the woods used to be dramatically, violently beautiful. January brought three-day storms that piled four- or five-foot-high drifts of fresh snow against the house, and then the sun would come out and for days on end our immediate world was one expanse of diamonds and ermine and crystal outlined against a sapphire sky. There were gorgeous white weekends when my women friends came up from New York and we'd go cross-countrying on the dirt roads around my house, leaving in the morning with a hard-boiled egg and a hunk of bread in our pockets and returning at dusk dazed by the sun. Those were also the years when my husband and I could go snowshoeing on top of three-foot-high drifts through the deep woods, into places made impenetrable in spring, summer, or fall by thick stubby undergrowth, walking way above the bushes and brambles, discovering murmurous brooks we had no way of visiting in the growing seasons. And there was that one particular storm—it must have been 1969—when the snow was so deep that school was called off for the rest of the week and our driveway was blocked by an eight-foot-high drift and the only way to get out was for two people to snowshoe across the pasture to the other end of our driveway and start digging a tunnel through the middle of the drift while the other two stayed on the home side and dug our own tunnel toward the opposite team, and what a celebration we had when we met in the middle! Then we all crawled through the tunnel together, with a few sleds—that was the best way to get food into the house on such days, to drag our sleds a mile down the public road to the general store and then pull the laden sleds back home.

For those of us who work at home, the day before a big snow can be exhilarating, too: You go to the village to lay in provisions and to share news of the forecasts—"It's going to be a big one," "Hartford says at least two feet." And as you're talking you're loading up on at least three days of food: lots of fresh greens and a sizable cut of meat that will leave plenty of leftovers, because there'll be so much to do when the blizzard's finished that you won't have much time to cook, and batteries of all sizes in case the power goes out—C's for the tape player and D's for the Coleman lamps and AA's for the book lights at night. And then you go home and wait for the velvet storm to come. And if you know it's going to be a big one you feel like an animal exulting over its carefully stocked lair, like the creature in Kafka's story "The Burrow" who rolls in his corridors "with pure joy" after he's stored up for winter and looks forward to "the sweet sleep of tranquillity, of satisfied desire, of achieved ambition."

What other treasures might come your way when a big snowstorm approaches? If your kids have left for college, during those precious snowbound days when you're unwilling or unable to go much beyond your driveway you can work on your books or your music or your knitting or your dreaming from early morning through the evening hours, just getting up occasionally to fix some food, in the knowledge that for the next day there'll be no appointments to keep with anyone outside your den, your cave, your hole. And the stillness, the quietude of such times soon become a drug—exhilarating, addictive, leading you to dread the return of the outside world, making you want to continue living "in peace in the inmost chamber" of your house, as Kafka's creature puts it, until the end of your days.

—FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY

RAG TRADE

A fashion institution loses the war against time.

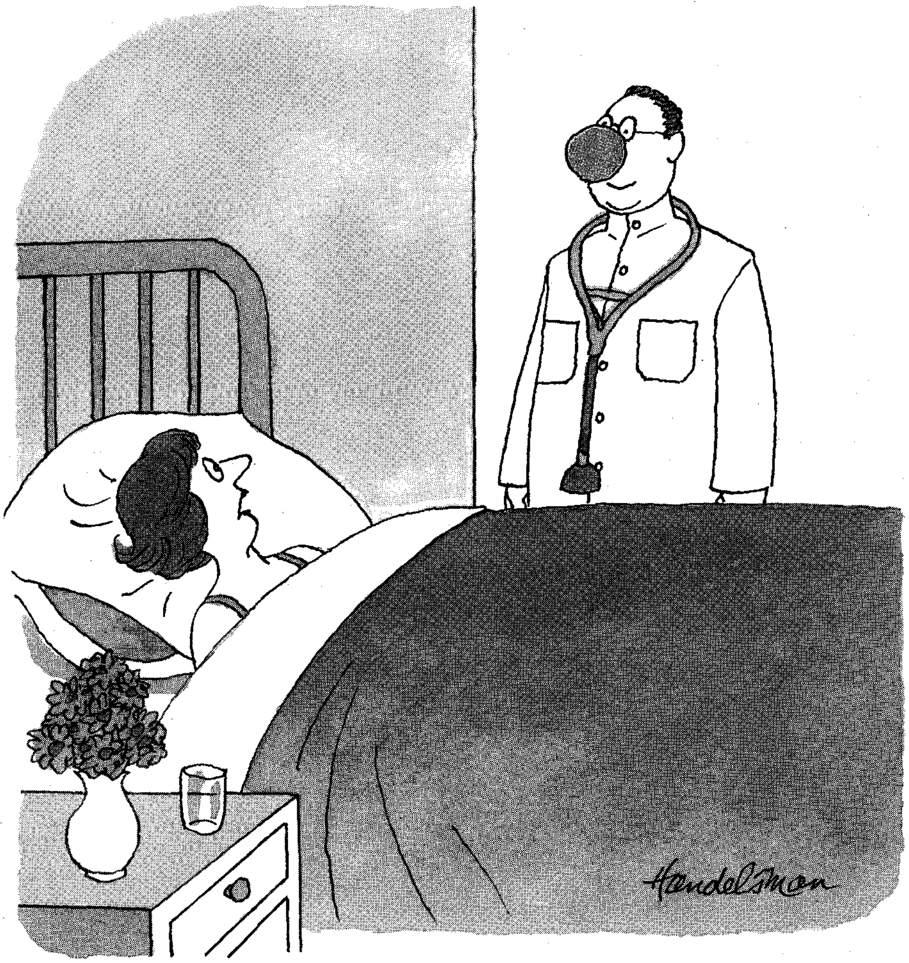
IF, during the nineteen-eighties, you wanted your clothes to indicate that you were (a) in the know, fashionwise; (b) a bit of an intellectual; and (c) not afraid of wearing unfinished seams or jackets turned inside out or other things that might, if worn without sufficient élan, look like thrift-store disasters, then you shopped at Charivari. Charivari was founded by a former dressmaker named Selma Weiser and her children Barbara and Jon during the mid-sixties on the Upper West Side, and it eventually expanded to midtown and Madison Avenue. The store was that peculiar contradiction in terms: an avant-garde institution. It was the place to go if you were not afraid of difficult fashions, if you enjoyed—as so many did back then—being swathed in something stark and strange made by a gloomy Belgian or by a Japanese designer who had highly original views about the proportions of the human body.

Last week, the starkest thing about Charivari on West Fifty-seventh Street was the enormous signs plastered all over the windows, which read, "By Order of Federal Bankruptcy Court: Closing Store Forever. Must Sell Out to the Bare Walls." And the strangest thing was the merchandise inside. Loyal customers hoping to find a pair of Martin Margiela pants at a knockdown price were disappointed. In place of the familiar stock, there were racks and racks of mass-market garments with very non-Charivari labels: Fendi coats, the kind of thing that tourists wear in SoHo on the weekend; dreary sweaters for men manufactured by something called Pronto Uomo; a Richard Tyler satin jacket, fit for an Upper East Side cocktail party; a tomato-colored, fur-trimmed swing coat with a Mondrian label. A diligent riffle through the racks did uncover a few of the kinds of thing the old Charivari was known for, marked down by sixty per cent: a couple of pairs of pants by the early Belgian deconstructionist Ann Demeulemeester (well, one pair now); a pair of flannel pants by one of Charivari's biggest names, Yohji Yamamoto; a few heavy wool sweaters by the young, newly cool designer Veronique Branquinho.

The closeout-sale manager, who identified himself as Mike and had a drape of hair curling over his burly neck, confirmed that most of the clothes in the store were not the leftovers of the Weisers' handpicked stock but had been brought in by the liquidators after the Weisers surrendered control of the store. (A sign above the cash register explained that anything with a Charivari price tag had been there prior to December 11th, when a court order authorized a closing sale; anything with a plain tag—that tomato fur coat, for starters—was brought in afterward.) The scattering of customers in the store didn't seem to know what to make of the closing, or the merchandise. "It's a tragedy—one store after another," a woman in a tailored blue coat, blue cloche hat, and shoes with cork platform soles said to the sales assistant behind the register.

Barbara Weiser said last week that relinquishing the business had been very sad, and that the company's overexpansion in the early nineties was partly to blame for the financial failure. "Part of the problem is that we made it all up ourselves," she said. "We could have used a strong C.E.O." She said that the attitude toward fashion had changed, too. "We got a lot of attention in the eighties, because people were interested in new merchandise and a store with a point of view," she explained. "By the time we opened on Madison Avenue, the world of marketing was upon us—you had to really be a player. The magazines were not as interested in the idea of talent, but, rather, in connections to starlets and Hollywood and things they could promote. I have a lot of respect for companies that can position themselves and develop that kind of strategy, but what happens in the process, unfortunately, is that there is a lot of inauthenticity."

Now there's no authenticity at Charivari, either. Weiser had to go back to the store last week to show some fixtures to a potential buyer. "There is nothing there that has anything to do with what we were," she said. "Rugby shirts . . ." She trailed off. "It was such a horrifying experience. It is a good thing I was going to my shrink afterward, because it absolutely laid me out." —REBECCA MEAD



"Give me a break, Doctor."

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE ULTIMATE GIMMICK

The country's shrewdest politician has decided that substance spins best.

BY JOE KLEIN

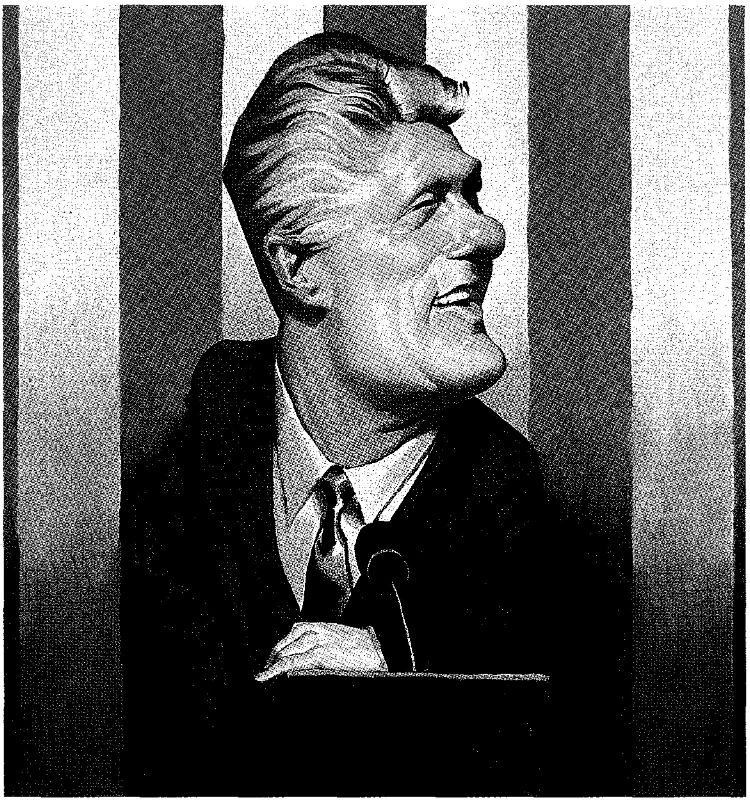
JUST a few minutes before Bill Clinton slipped, smiling, into the chamber of the House of Representatives to deliver his seventh State of the Union address, to one of the most bemused and annoyed audiences of elected officials ever assembled, CNN broadcast some poll results that revealed the perverse brilliance—the marketing artistry—at the heart of this stubbornly buoyant Presidency.

One of the poll questions was simply "How do you think most of the surplus money should be used?" Opinions were divided. Twenty-three per cent wanted to spend it on education. Fifteen per cent wanted to spend it on Social Security. Only nine per cent wanted to cut taxes. The second and third numbers were crucial. They gave the President the leverage to propose an initiative (investing in Social Security) that was more popular than the inevitable Republican reaction (cutting taxes). He could stand before the nation—in the midst of a withering personal scandal, in the midst of an impeachment trial in the Senate—and announce great gobs of good news, an unimaginable financial windfall, and a program for action (almost certainly pre-tested by his marketing team) guaranteed to ingratiate him further with the public, while the Republicans could only look on, paralyzed and apoplectic. Clinton could seem high-minded, visionary, prudent (and, as ever, prolix) in directly addressing his fellow baby boomers' worst fears about their parents' health-care costs, their children's education, and their own retirement years. By contrast, the Republicans could be made to seem small, selfish, and greedy: obsessed by immediate gratifications, in the form of tax cuts and their never-ending Lewinsky fetish. The reality was more complicated, of course, but the political virtuosity of the President's positioning was impeccable.

"He's taunting us," one Republican had told CNN earlier in the day. Actually, it was worse than that: Clinton was bludgeoning them. The speech was carefully structured so that the most popular proposals came first: the Social Security fix; then government-supported personal-retirement savings plans (felicitously dubbed U.S.A. Accounts); then a long section on education, filled with stern-sounding nostrums (no more social promotions, more rigorous teacher testing); then a salute to one of the pilots from Operation Desert Fox, sitting in the First Lady's box, which was a gesture calculated to prod even the most intransigent Republicans from their seats; then a similar ovation for Sammy Sosa; then the civil-rights heroine Rosa Parks; and then Hillary. The proposals popped more slowly as the speech progressed and a great microwaved policy bag got bigger and bigger, with fifty thousand more police officers and seventy thousand more teachers. As the national audience became sated—no doubt the Clinton marketing team had known exactly how many minutes the public could be held—it dwindled down to a core of political junkies and untended constituencies, like environmentalists. The tree-huggers' concerns were finally acknowledged, more than an hour into the epic, with the billion-dollar "Livability Agenda" and "Lands Legacy Initiative." In the end, every last base was not only touched but caressed.

By then, the camera was panning empty seats in the Republican section. The bounders seemed small, impolite, disrespectful. The House Majority Leader, Dick Armey, and the Whip, Tom DeLay—tough Texans both—remained planted in their seats to the end, but they might have been better served if they'd followed the example of the House Judiciary chairman, Henry Hyde, and never appeared at all: each time the television cameras found them, Armey and DeLay seemed frozen in mid-snit, cartoon villains, pouting or smirking—singularly unattractive schoolyard spoilsports.

And so Bill Clinton's mastery of this political era continued, against all odds—a conundrum that should engender academic head-scratching for decades to come. Yes, the economy is strong, foreign threats are minimal, and domestic problems are on the wane, but those are only the most obvious parameters of the Clin-



The President's poll-driven State of the Union Message suggests that modern marketing techniques can serve a grander purpose.

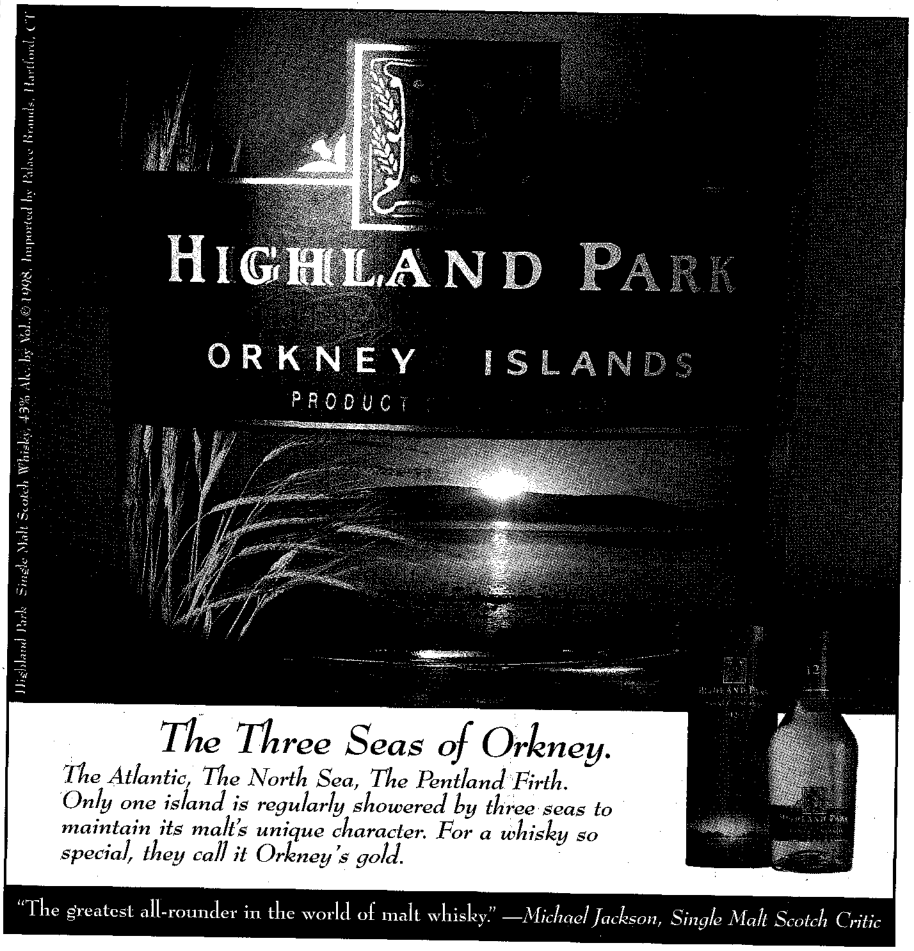
DANIEL ADEL

ton phenomenon—mere conversation starters. The President's success last week had at least two other components, neither of which was very inspiring.

ONE is inexplicable: the fabulous ineptitude of the current crop of Republicans. A decade ago, as sleek operatives like Lee Atwater and Peggy Noonan maneuvered the estimable but clueless George Bush toward the Presidency, the conservative party was considered peerless at manipulating public prejudices to its electoral advantage. The Democrats were assumed to be moribund, without brains or pulse or toughness. Now one need look no farther than the Senate chamber, where the impeachment trial of the President is in progress, to see how completely the balance has shifted.

After the heavy molasses that had characterized the opening statements from the Republican prosecutors, the White House lawyers—oft-criticized for their finicky legalisms throughout the Year of Lewinsky—produced an elegant, perfectly calibrated show, far more convincing (and entertaining) than the repetitious, history-tickled House managers'. The folksy summation by the President's Arkansas buddy, former Senator Dale Bumpers, will probably be regarded as the most memorable of the opening statements—the senators, who had been stolid in their seats and straining not to doze through most of the previous week's presentations, suddenly perked up, leaned forward, laughed. But the real legal star was the White House counsel Charles F. C. Ruff, who opened the President's defense with a devastating assault, on the same day that Clinton delivered his State of the Union Message.

Ruff—wheelchair-bound, his head swivelling heavily below hunched shoulders, his voice just slightly more vivid than an electronic hum—identified three significant obstacles to the Republican impeachment case: first, none of the likely witnesses to the obstruction charges disagreed with the President's version of events in any material way; second, there was nothing in the record, no testimony—only prosecutorial surmise (and occasional overreach)—to support those charges; and, third, it would be a lot harder to *prove*



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that Bill Clinton had perjured himself in his careful grand-jury testimony than to suggest that Clinton had lied in his defiant but now irrelevant Paula Jones deposition. (The impeachment article asserting perjury in the Jones case had been rejected by the House.)

It has been argued—mostly by other Republicans—that there is honor in the Party's unpopular insistence upon a stern standard of morality in loose times, and there is some truth to that. Those who have stood too sternly for anything—as the Clintons did for health-insurance reform in 1994, and as Newt Gingrich did for Medicare reform in 1996, and as the Republicans now do for impeachment—have suffered for their sanctimony in the nineties. And it may well be that the Republicans' traditional tropism, toward a darker view of human nature, fares less well in times of plenty. Then again, Bill Clinton may just be a better political tactician—with a surer visceral sense of what the traffic will bear—than any of the current Republican leaders. And that is why Clinton's return to large themes and big ideas in his State of the Union address, after several years of political pointillism, is significant: it signals another political turning point that he saw first.

No doubt, the acuity of the Clinton antennae has been augmented in recent years by the President's mad embrace of the latest polling and market-testing techniques—an obsession that sends true believers of the right and of the left up a wall. Clinton has never been shy about this: he has always been an avid consumer of polling. But since his 1994 election embarrassment, when Congress was lost to the Republicans, the President has been an absolute slave to data: nothing is left to chance (or, sadly, to moral imperative). Each new idea is market-tested before it is presented to the public—a process perfected by the consultant Dick Morris and presided over now by the pollster Mark Penn. Other Presidents have been poll-obsessed, but none quite so microscopically as this one. Can there be any question, for example, that Clinton polled the public on whether or not he should acknowledge the Lewinsky matter in the State of the Union address? (A post-speech ABC News poll showing that seventy-nine per cent were happy that the President didn't was probably no surprise to Mark Penn.) Such micro-marketing may be remembered as this President's most lasting, and most dubious, contribution to the art of governance.

But it does seem to work. And this year's State of the Union proved that the techniques can be mobilized not just to elucidate the "bite-size" Presidential initiatives favored by Dick Morris but also in the service of grander ideas: there was nothing small about the President's fifteen-year, four-trillion-dollar plan to invest in retirement benefits and medical care for the baby-boom generation. Indeed, it was about as bold as "issue" politics ever gets—particularly the brash and decidedly un-Clintonian insistence that *none* of the money be used for tax cuts. It was a declaration of war, but an almost reassuring one—war on the familiar terrain of less or more, now or later. It promised, after an awful year of thongs and other things, a serious public discussion—if Congress sees fit to have one—about whether it is better for government to save for the future or to leave such decisions to the wisdom of individual citizens.

After the President's speech, senators and representatives drifted groggily through the Capitol's Statuary Hall—the designated post-speech blabbing area. The place was jammed with reporters, most of whom were still stuck in impeachment, wondering if things had been "awkward" in the House chamber. And, while some of the politicians were happy to confirm the weirdness of the moment—"schizophrenia at its highest," said Pennsylvania's Arlen Specter, with a slight smile that indicated he was in heavy sound-bite mode—most seemed more interested in and relieved to be discussing the surprising substance of the President's speech.

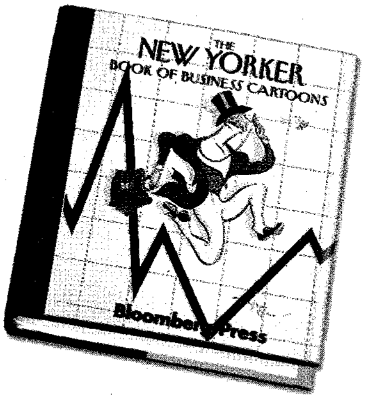
"He shortchanged national defense!" said Arizona's John McCain, pushing through to a television interview.

"He must have listed about thirty new programs," said Rhode Island's John Chafee.

"Not a nickel for a tax cut!" said New Mexico's Pete Domenici. "Can you believe that? Outrageous!"

But all four of these respected and reasonable Senate Republicans were smiling. ♦

Very funny business, indeed!



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COP DIARY

INSIDE DOPE

Scenes from the life of an officer on the narcotics beat.

BY MARCUS LAFFEY

IF there were ever a Super Bowl match-up of junkies versus crackheads, it would be hard to figure which team the odds would favor. Both sides would most likely disappear during halftime. The crackheads would believe that they had won, and the junkies wouldn't care. If they did manage to finish the game, the smartest money would invest in a pawnshop next to the stadium, and within hours the investors would own every Super Bowl ring, for pennies on the dollar. Winners and losers would again be indistinguishable.

Stash might be hidden in a chip bag, a light fixture, or a magnetic key case under a park bench.

SUSAN MEISELAS/MAGNUM

The war on drugs is a game for me, no matter how urgent it is for poor neighborhoods or how grave the risks are for cops. We call dealers "players," and there are rules as in chess, percentages as in poker, and moves as in schoolyard ball. When I went from being a beat cop to working in narcotics, the change was refreshing. For one thing, you deal only with criminals. No more domestic disputes, barricaded schizophrenics, or D.O.A.s, the morass of negotiable and nonnegotiable difficulties people have with their neighbors or boyfriends or stepchildren. Patrol cops deal with the fluid whole of people's lives, but usually when the tide's going out: people who have the cops called on them aren't happy to see you; people who call the cops aren't calling when they're having a good time. Now all I do is catch sellers of crack and heroin, and catch their customers to show that they sold it. The parts of their lives unaffected by coca- or opium-based products are none of my business. Patrol is politics, but narcotics is pure technique.

My unit, which consists of half a dozen cops and a sergeant, makes arrests for "observation sales." One or two of us go to an observation post ("the OP," and if you're in it you're "doing OPs") on a rooftop or in a vacant apartment to watch a "set," or drug operation, and transmit information to the "catch car," the unmarked van used to pick up the perps. The set might be a lone teen-ager standing on a corner with one pocket full of crack and another full of cash. Or it might be an organization of such intricate subterfuge—with lookouts, managers, moneymen, steerers (to guide customers), and pitchers (for the hand-to-hand transactions)—that you'd think its purpose was to deliver Soviet microfilm to covert operatives instead of a ten-dollar bag of junk to a junkie. But we watch, and give descriptions of buyers for the catch team to pick up, a few blocks away. Sometimes the dealers send out phantom or dummy buyers—people who appear to have bought narcotics but haven't—to see if they're stopped; we wait until we have a handful of buyers, then move in on the set. Most of the spots that we hit are well established, visited by both customers and cops on a regular basis; others pop up and disappear. You might drive around to see who's out—the faces at the places, the traffic pattern of steady customers and usual suspects. Sometimes you feel like the man on the catwalks over the casino floor, scanning the tables for the sharps and card counters, looking out for luck that's too good to be true. Other times, you feel as if you were watching a nature program, some *National Geographic* special on the felony ecology of the streets.

YOU read the block, seeing who moves and who stands still, their reactions and relations to one another; you sift the players from the idlers, the buyers from the passersby. Most people occupy their environment blithely, with only a slack and occasional awareness of their surroundings. A store window or a noisy garbage truck might distract them in passing, and they might look around before crossing the street, but the ordinary pedestrian is a poster child for daydreams and tunnel vision. Not so in the narcotics trade, where the body language of buyer and seller alike signals a taut awareness of opportunity and threat. There are distinctive addict walks, such as that of the prowler, who might be new to the spot, or sussing out an operation that has shifted to a more favorable corner. He hovers, alert for the deal, floating like a flake of ash above a fire. The addict on a "mission walk" moves with double-quick footsteps, leaning forward, as if against a strong wind, so as not to waste an extra second of his already wasted life. A player, on the other hand, has a self-contained watchfulness, a false repose, like a cat sunning itself on a windowsill, eyes half-closed but ready to pounce.

Every street set operates through an odd combination of aggressive marketing and strategic defense, needing simultaneously to broadcast and to deny its function. The young man on the park bench should look like a high-school senior from thirty yards away but has to show he's a merchant at three yards, and he has to have the drugs near enough for convenience but far enough away to be out of his "custody and control" should he be stopped. If he's holding the drugs, he has to have an escape route—through a hole in a fence, say, or into an alley, or into the building where his grandmother lives. The man on the bench is just a man on a bench, after all, until his context proves him otherwise. But, as you watch, figures emerge from the flow of street life like coördinates on a grid, like pins on a drug map.

Say you're doing OPs from a rooftop, looking down on a street that has three young guys on the corner by the bodega, a couple with a baby in a carriage by the stoop, and a group of old men with brown-bagged brandy bottles by the vacant lot. A man on a bicycle moves in a slow, lazy slalom, up and down the street. The corner boys are the obvious pick, but I have to wait. When a buyer comes, he is easier to recognize, and his arrival on the set sends a signal, a vibration, like a fly landing in the web. The buyer is the bellwether and the bait: he draws the players out and makes them work, prompts them into visible display.

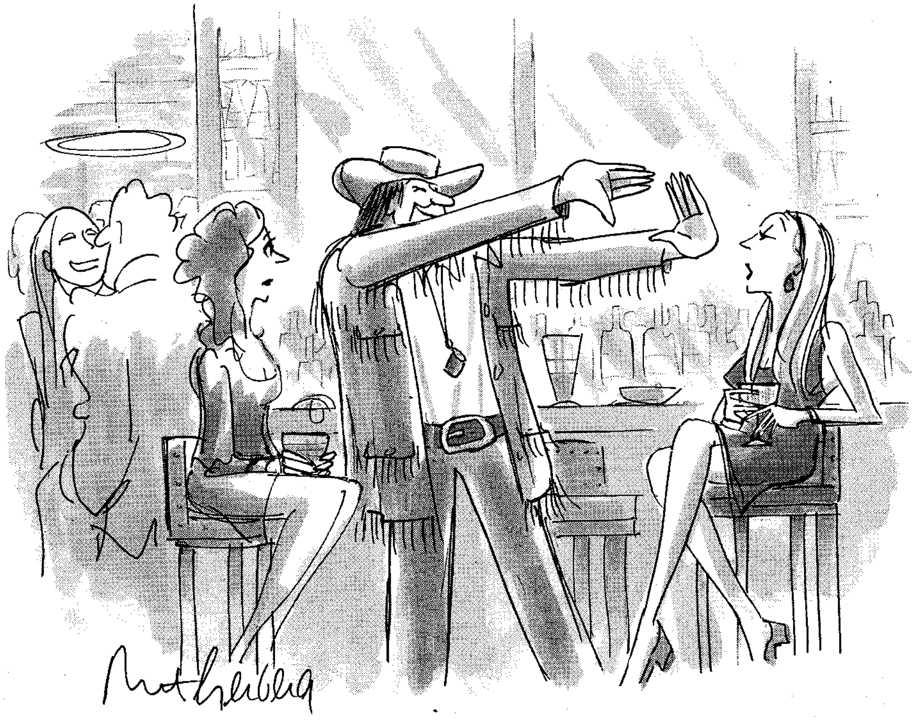
The buyer walks past the old men at the lot, the family on the stoop, to the corner boys, as expected. One corner boy takes the buyer aside and palms his cash, the second stands still, watching up and down the block, and the third goes to the family on the stoop and has a word with the woman with the baby. The woman steps inside the lobby for a few seconds—Thank God, I think, it's not in the carriage—and when she returns she hands something to the third boy, who meets up with the first corner boy and the buyer and hands off the product. The buyer walks away, retracing his route. The man on the bicycle follows him slowly.

I put the buyer over the air: "Hispanic male; red cap; Tommy Hilfiger jacket, blue; bluejeans. South on Third. Be advised, you got a lookout on a bike—white T-shirt, bluejeans, black bike—tailing him to see if he gets picked up. Let him run a couple of blocks, if you can."

Now I have a three-player set, with Mama and corner boys Nos. 1 and 3 down cold. The buyer should be taken, and No. 2 only observed for now. Mama's short time in the building tells me that the stash is not in an apartment but either on her person or right in the lobby, in an unlocked mailbox or a crack in the wall. Corner boy No. 2 is the one to watch, to see if he's the manager or a lookout, up a rank from the others or down. His position will become clear as I watch the group dynamic of the trio—the choreography of who stands where, who talks and who listens, who tells the jokes and who laughs, who's the one that runs to the bodega for the chips and soda. Until he participates in the exchanges, taking money or product, he's legally safe from arrest for an observation sale. If he's a manager, he's the one we want; if he's a smart manager, touching neither cash nor stash, he's the one we're least likely to get. In a sense, everybody wants the spot to get busy: the players grow careless as they get greedy, bringing out more product, paying more heed to the customer and less to us. The manager might have to step in and lend an incriminating hand. When the spot is slow, both groups—the cops and the players—have to be patient.

Even when nothing happens, there is much to interpret. Are they out of product, and will they re-up within ten minutes or an hour? Are they "raised"—afraid we're around—and, if so, is it because they saw our van (unmarked but patently obvious) or saw one of us peering over the roofline, or is it because a patrol car raced by, to a robbery three blocks away? Did they turn away another customer because he wanted credit, or because they thought he was an undercover cop, and were they right? Is the next deal worth the wait?

THE wait can be the most trying part of the operation. I've spent hours on tar rooftops, crouched down till my legs cramped, sweating, shivering, wiping the rain from my binoculars every ten seconds. There have been times when I've forgotten to look down before I knelt by the ledge, and settled in beside


"Tiffany tells me that you were at Sundance."

LES GRANDES PASSIONS MANQUÉES

Had she survived her immolation
and lived on in quiet disfigurement,
Dido would have hated the lost fire
and partial combustion and what in her
was earthen and too insipid to burn.

—Irving Feldman

piles of shit, broken glass, or syringes. On one rooftop, there was an ornate Victorian birdcage, five feet tall, bell-shaped and made of brass, and chained to it, still on a rotten leather leash, was the skeleton of a pit bull. You walk up dirty stairs to a dirty roof to watch a dirty street. At night, even the light is dirty, the sodium-vapor street lights giving off a muddy yellow haze. But sometimes, when something finally does happen, you realize that your concentration is perfect: you feel the cool, neutral thrill of being completely submerged in your task. The objects of surveillance inhabit a living landscape, and you can be struck by the small, random graces of the scene even as you transmit a streak of facts over the radio: "Gray livery cab, buyer in back seat, passenger side, possible white with white sleeves, U-turning now to the left. . . ."

A soap bubble, then two, then dozens rise up in front of me, iridescent, shimmering in their uncertainty. There is a child two floors below me, as rapt with the view above as I am with the view below.

"Arright, we got one, he's beelining to the player, they just popped into the lobby. . . . Now he's out—that's fast, he must have the stash on him. Arright, buyer's walking off now— Hold on, he's just kind of idling across the street. It's not an I-got-my-rock walk. I don't think he got done. Stand by. . . ."

A man standing on another tenement roof whirls an orange flag, and makes it snap like a towel. His flock of pigeons takes flight from the coop with a whoosh like a gust of wind, spiralling out in broadening arcs—showing the smoky gray of their backs as they bank out, the silver-white of their bellies as they circle in—rising up all the while.

"Player's walking off, he sent the last two away, he's out, he's raised, I don't know, but— Go! Go! Go! Hit the set!"

An incinerator chimney shoots out a lash of black smoke, which loops into a lariat before dissolving into the grimy sky.

At the other end of the OP is the catch car. You want a buyer's description, or "scrip," to have something distinctive about it—something beyond the "white T-shirt, bluejeans" of warm weather, "black jacket, bluejeans" of cold. You don't want "Male, walking three pit bulls." You're glad to hear about hot pink and lime green, or T-shirts with legible writing on them, or, even better, "Female in purple-and-yellow tracksuit, with a Cat-in-the-Hat hat, riding a tiny bicycle." For crackheads, as much as for any other species, protective coloration can be a successful evolutionary strategy.

Once you get the scrip and the buyer's direction of flight, you move in, allowing yourself some distance from the set, but not too much, or else the buyer will be home; in neighborhoods like this, people don't have to go far for hard drugs. Sometimes buyers run, and sometimes they fight, and sometimes they toss the drugs (though sometimes you can find those drugs later), and sometimes they eat them when they see you coming. There have been buyers who at the sight of me have reacted with a loss of bowel control, and control of the belly and the bladder as well. The truth is, I am the least of their problems: a night on a cell bench, with prison bologna sandwiches to eat, ranks fairly low amid the hazards of being at the bottom of the criminal food chain.

For crackheads, in particular, a stint as a model prisoner might be a career peak. While the street dealers at dope spots are often junkies themselves, crackheads can't be trusted with the stash—they can't even hold a job whose main requirements are to stand still and watch. The majority of them are figures from a famine: bone-thin and filthy. Months of that life take years from their lives, and thirty-year-olds can pass for fifty, burned out almost literally, with a red-hot core of desperation beneath a dead, charred surface. Junkies generally have a longer ride to the bottom, as the habit gradually slides from being a part of their lives to becoming the point of them. Heroin is purer now than it was in the past, and fewer than half the addicts I arrest have needles on them. They snort it instead of shooting it, which decreases the risk of disease and also seems to slow the forward momentum of addiction. But to me the terminal junkies are especially awful, because they have none of the trapped-rat frenzy of the crackhead; instead, they possess a fatal calm, as if they were keeping their eyes open while drowning. When you collar them, they can have a look of confirmed and somehow contented self-hatred, as if the world were doing to them what they expect and deserve.

Addicts deserve pity, always, though often they inspire contempt. We collared one crackhead, bumping into him by accident as he stood in a project lobby counting out a handful of vials. He was a street peddler who sold clothing, and had about eighty dollars in his pocket. He had the shrink-wrapped look that crackheads get, as if his skin were two sizes too small. He moaned and wept for his infant child, who would starve, he said, without his support. Yes, he acknowledged, the baby lived with its mother, but he was the provider. The mother and child were only about ten blocks away, at a playground, so we drove to meet them. The mother was a pretty, well-dressed woman, though her soccer-mom wholesomeness may have been artificially heightened by the presence of her handcuffed mate. We called her over, and her look of mild confusion became one of mild dismay as she saw our back-seat passenger. She didn't look surprised, and didn't ask questions. He took out his wad of cash, peeled off four dollars, and handed it to me to give to her. "You gotta be kidding me," I said. "You give me all this father-of-the-year shit, just to throw her four bucks?"

"C'mon," he said. "When you get

out of Central Booking, you're hungry, you want some real McDonald's or something."

I gave him back the four dollars and took the wad for the mother. "The Number Two Special, two cheeseburgers and fries, is three-twenty-nine," I told him. "It's what I get, and it's all you can afford." For an addict, the priorities are never unclear.

After you've collared the buyers, it's time to move in on the dealers. When you hit a set, there is always a charge of adrenaline, arising from the jungle-war vagaries of opponent and terrain. There are elusive adversaries, explosive ones, and lots of sitting ducks. Some dealers opt for a businesslike capitulation, aware that it's the way to go through the process with the least fuss. Others, especially lobby dealers with access to an apartment upstairs, tend to make a mad dash for freedom. The bust could be a surrender as slow and dignified as Lee's at Appomattox or it could be bedlam—roiling bodies and airborne stash. When you can't count the evidence at the scene, you have to at least control it—the hundreds of dollars in small bills, the fistfuls of crack slabs, the loose decks, the bundles of dope—so you jam it in your pockets like a handful of ball bearings, and all the while there may be a crowd screaming, or perps for whom the fight-or-flight reflex is not a simple either-or proposition.

The smarter dealers carry nothing on them, but you await information from the OP, sometimes with a distaste that verges on dread:

"It's in his sock."

"It's in the cast on his right hand—"

"It's in his cheek—sorry, guy, the other cheek. I mean, check between 'em, you copy?"

Stash can be hidden under a bottle cap or in a potato-chip bag, or strewn among heaps of noncriminal trash; it can be wedged in a light fixture in a hall or tucked inside the bumper of a car; it can be in a magnetic key case stuck to the iron bolt beneath a park bench; or it can be on a string taped to the wall and dangling down the garbage-disposal chute. A thorough search can lead to unexpected threats and rewards. Once, when I was rooting through a janitor's closet in a housing project after hitting a heroin set, I found a machine gun in the bottom of a bag of clothes. We continued to search the building and found more than a thousand dollars' worth of heroin, two more guns—a 9-mm. handgun and a .45 revolver—and also ammunition for another machine gun, an AK-47: copper-jacketed bullets more than two inches long, coming to a sharp, conical point like a dunce cap. An AK-47 can discharge bullets at a speed of more than two thousand feet per second, which would allow them to pass through my vest with barely a pause.

In the movies, there are a lot of drug-dealer villains, but those characters usually have to slap their girlfriends or kill a lot of cops to heighten the dramatic point of their bad-guyness. Because the victims of drug sales line up and pay, so to speak, for the privilege, the perpetrators don't have the forthright menace of violent felons. But most of the players I collar have a rap sheet that shows a more diversified criminal career—of earlier forays into robbery or theft—before they settled on the more lucrative and "less illegal" world of drug sales. And although some drug spots operate in a fairly quiet, orderly manner, as if a man were selling newspapers on the street, or a couple were running a catalogue business out of their apartment, most are established and maintained by means of assault, murder, and many subtler thefts of human dignity.

In New York, heroin dealers stamp brand names on the little wax-paper envelopes in which the drug is packaged. This practice gives a glimpse not only of a corporate structure, when the same brands appear in different sites, but also of a corporate imagination, showing what they believe their product should mean to their customers. Some convey the blandly generic aspiration of quality—"First Class," "President," "Original"—that you might find on brands of cornflakes or of detergent in some discount supermarket. Others go for a racier allure, but the gimmick is so hackneyed in conventional advertising that the genuinely illicit thrill of "Knockout" or "No Limit" suggests the mock-illicit thrill of ads for perfume or fat-free ice cream. Topical references are common, from the flat-out copyright infringement of "DKNY" or "Ford" to the movie tagline "Show Me the Money." But the best brand names are the literal ones, which announce without apology the bad things to come: "911," "25 to Life," "Undertaker," "Fuck You." There is a suicidal candor to "Lethal Injection" and "Virus," a forthright finality to "O.D."—a truth in advertising here that few products can match.

Recently, I had a talk with one of my informants, a junkie with AIDS who sleeps in an alley. A few days before, I'd obtained a search warrant for a spot he visits several times a day, and he fervently wished me luck with the warrant's execution. That my success would cause him inconvenience in supplying his own habit was a mild irony that did not trouble him. He said, "I know you're a cop and I'm—" and there was a sliver of space before his next word, enough for me to wonder what term he might use for a shorthand self-portrait. And, knowing that there would be a measure of harsh truth in it, I was still surprised, and even felt sorry for him, when he said, "And I'm a fucking scumbag." But he was equally firm in his opinion of those who had benefitted from his self-destruction: "I done time, I'm no hero, but these people are blood-suckers. Them and rapists are as bad as people get. Those people are worse than rapists. Those dealers will suck you dry. I hope you get every last one of them."

Every day, we go out and hunt people. When we do well—picking off the customers with dispatch, swooping in on the dealers, taking trophies of their product and profit—we feel skilled and lucky at once, at the top of our game. We have shut down spots, reduced robberies and shootings, made whole blocks cleaner, safer, saner places. But other spots withstand daily assaults from us with negligible losses, and I've driven home after a twenty-hour day only to recognize, with the hallucinatory clarity of the sleep-deprived, the same man, on the same mission walk, that I'd collared the night before. Typically, buyers spend a night in jail and are sentenced to a few days of community service. Players might get less, odd as that may seem, if there weren't enough transactions in open view, or if no stash was recovered. We'll all meet again, soon enough. There are breaks and interruptions, retirements and replacements, but, no matter how often the whistle blows, the game is never over. ♦

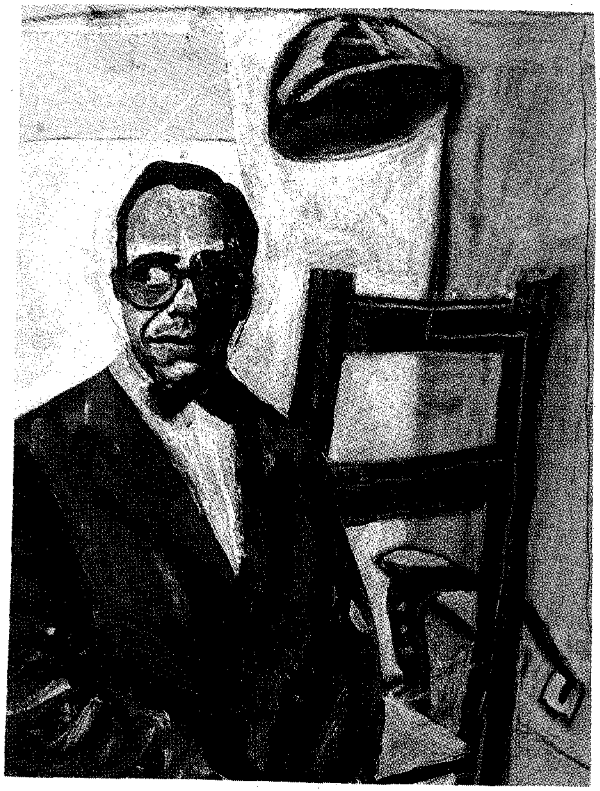
ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE FRIENDLY EXECUTIONER

How did an electric-chair repairman come to deny the Holocaust? And other odd questions.

BY MARK SINGER

ONCE, when Errol Morris was in his early twenties—he's now fifty—he was asked by a psychiatrist, "Do you ever have unwanted thoughts?" His reply: "Are there any other kind?" The most engagingly tormented of filmmakers, Morris has been turning out for two decades, at a slightly swifter than glacial pace, highly idiosyncratic nonfiction narratives in which the profoundly funny harmonizes with the poetically disturbing. For a while, also in his twenties, he began working toward a doctorate in philosophy, but he got sidetracked by an extracurricular interest in mass murderers; Morris has always been absorbed less with questions about why we're here than with the implications of how, abruptly, any one of us might not be. "Fast, Cheap & Out of Control" (1997), for instance, is a kaleidoscopic portrait of four obsessed men—a lion tamer, a topiary gardener, an inventor of insect-like robots, and a researcher into the habits of a mammal known as the African naked mole rat—whose ostensibly unrelated monologues are bound together by the director's generous curiosity, droll cinematic vocabulary, and, above all, empathy for the doomed and obsession with death: its terrifying ineffability, its "oops, time's up" arbitrariness.


In Errol Morris's "Mr. Death," Fred Leuchter tries on many identities.

ANDREA VENTURA

This preoccupation lurks, never deeply submerged, in all of Morris's work: "Gates of Heaven" (1978), which explored a pair of California pet cemeteries; "Vernon, Florida" (1981), a pastiche of interviews with the motley inhabitants of a benighted Southern swamp town; "The Thin Blue Line" (1988), the story of a miscarriage of justice in a Texas capital-murder case; and "A Brief History of Time" (1992), an adaptation of the book of that title by the celebrated but only dimly understood theoretical physicist and thinker Stephen Hawking. Several years ago, Morris's wife, Julia Sheehan, went to the Strand Bookstore, in Greenwich Village, to pick up some books he had ordered. When a clerk had trouble locating the books, she apologetically explained that she didn't know the titles but she assumed that the subject matter had something to do with insanity or murder or Nazis. As it happened, there was one of each. Morris's newest film, which in a not quite completed state was just shown at the Sundance Film Festival, in Utah, characteristically (and

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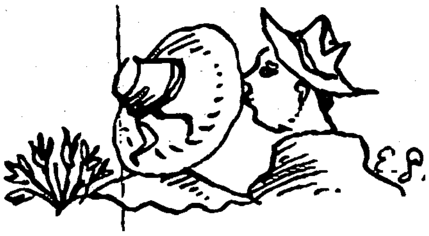
unsurprisingly) has the working title "Mr. Death." The Mr. Death in question is Fred A. Leuchter, Jr., a geeky middle-aged fellow with a high forehead, prominent ears, a pasty complexion, thick-framed eyeglasses, and a marbly Boston accent—so quintessentially an Errol Morris character that, as the film progresses, his delivery into the filmmaker's clutches seems preordained, one more component of an eerie fate.

"I became involved in the manufacture of execution equipment because I was concerned with the deplorable condition of the hardware that's in most of the states' prisons, which generally results in torture prior to death," Leuchter declares in an opening monologue. "A number of years ago I was asked by a state to look at their electric chair. I was surprised at the condition of the equipment and I indicated to them what changes should be made to bring the equipment up to the point of doing a humane execution."

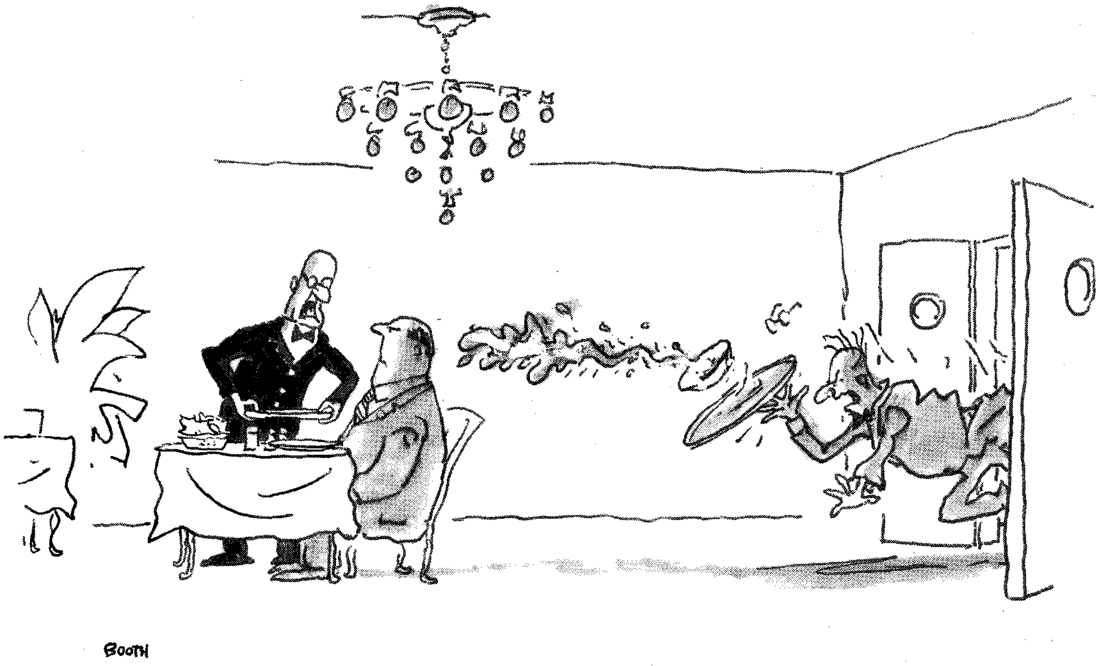
This last phrase confirms what we already know—that we've waded into the realm of chin-deep irony. Where but in an Errol Morris film—other than, perhaps, the Ravenite Social Club in its heyday—could one encounter a businesslike man cheerfully describing the proper ritual for killing another human being? Morris, a seductive cultural anthropologist, beckons, and we tag along gladly, because—well, this will surely be more fun than an Andy Hardy movie. Without giving a hint of where the film is heading, Morris allows Leuchter to expatiate upon his life and his craft. The son of a Massachusetts correctional-system employee, he started at the age of four, "as many youngsters do," accompanying his father to work, which in his case meant visiting "all of the cell areas, including the death-house area." As an adult, he designed electric chairs and lethal-injection machines, billing clients "for the parts, the labor, and the installation and a twenty-per-cent markup, which is more than fair." Leuchter has strong views about execution protocol. Why should lethal injections be performed with the executee strapped on a gurney, staring at the ceiling? he asks. "You could put him in a contoured chair like they have in a dentist's office . . . at least he'd be sitting up," Leuchter proposes. "You could give him a television, you could give him music, you could put some pictures on the wall." (Here Morris cuts to a framed Currier and Ives winter scene.) As for the electric chair, he says that the optimal apparatus should regulate the flow of current evenly, so that "the meat" doesn't "come off the executee's body like the meat coming off a cooked chicken." There is also a safety issue for prison employees who must deal with the untidy aftermath of an electrocution: "I think everybody knows that urine is highly conductive." Of the four execution methods Leuchter has dealt with—electrocution, hanging, lethal injection, and gas—he himself "would much rather be electrocuted," provided that the equipment employed could be an electric chair he'd fabricated himself: "I'd like the execution procedure to go smoothly."

The interview with Leuchter illustrates Morris's methodology. It involves seating a subject in front of what Morris calls an Interrotron—a two-way mirror that is like a television screen projecting the image of Morris's face. Behind the mirror is a camera fitted with a fixed lens. Morris asks as few questions as possible, and lets the truth flow along with alternating currents of benign disingenuousness, malignant prevarication, and potentially tragic false belief. His style is to dwell on a subject—a face, in the case of an interview, or an object, and particularly a mundane one, such as a book or a drawing. There is something like a lyrical literalness in the approach: the objects, it seems, speak for themselves.

The first whiff of what's to come in "Mr. Death" is an arresting image of just that—the smoky vapor of a hydrogen-cyanide gas chamber. Leuchter is no fan of gas chambers: "Every time there's a gas execution, it's an accident waiting to happen. There is a major danger of leakage." Morris then segues to glimpses of Leuchter's personal life, including several shots of coffee brewing and being stirred in a cup. (In one scene, a reflection of Leuchter's face shimmers.) We learn that Leuchter has a forty-cup-a-day caffeine habit, and that he used to supplement it with six packs of cigarettes. While hanging out at a Dunkin' Donuts in his home town, Malden, Massachusetts, where the coffee was especially to his liking, he met his future wife, Carolyn, who worked there as a waitress. They became engaged in late 1987, and shortly thereafter they went to Toronto to meet a man named Ernst Zündel. And then, at roughly the midpoint of "Mr. Death," an intertitle announces "The Trial of Ernst Zündel," and the movie jumps the divider with head-snapping suddenness. In a blink, it feels as if one had dashed to the lobby for popcorn, then dashed back into the wrong theatre, where—whoa!—a movie about Holocaust denial was being screened. Zündel, it turns out, is a notorious neo-Nazi, the author of, among other works, "The Hitler We Loved and Why," and is also the publisher of books with titles like "Did Six Million Really Die?" and "The Auschwitz Lie." And straight-talking Fred A. Leuchter, Jr., a self-described "engineer," a passionate and compelling champion of even the most odious individual's right to be executed in a nice way, is about to be reintroduced to us in another of his identities—as the author of "The Leuchter Report," which is one of the most treacherous documents ever generated by the Holocaust-denial movement.



When Leuchter met Zündel, a German national who, to the chagrin of Canadian authorities, resides in Toronto, the man had already been tried and convicted under a Canadian law that forbids the publication of a false statement that could "cause injury or mischief to a public interest." (In Germany, Holocaust denial is a crime.) But before Zündel began serving a fifteen-month prison sentence a new trial was ordered, on procedural grounds. A French associate of Zündel's named Robert Faurisson, who was a leading exponent of Holocaust "revisionism" or "negationism," urged Zündel's attorney to get in touch with several United States prison officials on Zündel's behalf, seeking information about the design and operation of cyanide-gas execution devices. Faurisson wanted to prove that Zündel could not have disseminated a "false fact." It was Fauris-



"Your squash medley will be right out, sir."

• •

son's conceit that the so-called myth of the gas chambers could be exploded by forensic analysis of the crematoria at Auschwitz and its much larger annex, Birkenau. In 1980, Faurisson had written an incendiary tract—"Memoirs in Defense Against Those Who Accused Me of Falsifying History/On the Topic of the Gas Chambers"—in which he asserted that the crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau were not instruments of genocide but morgues that had simply been kept very busy mainly by the high mortality from typhus and other diseases. Now he just needed a capital-punishment expert to prove it. It seems, in retrospect, that at the instant the warden of the Missouri State Penitentiary referred Zündel to Leuchter—a builder of execution equipment who, by the way, has never actually witnessed an execution—an Errol Morris movie began to gestate.

In late February, 1988, Leuchter went to Poland, bankrolled by Zündel and accompanied not only by his new bride, Carolyn, but also by a draftsman, a video-camera operator, and a translator. Their itinerary included a four-day inspection tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and, in addition, a day at Majdanek, the former concentration camp near Lublin. (Morris, who followed Leuchter's journey ten years later, briefly toyed with calling his film "Honeymoon in Auschwitz.") This undertaking was expensive—it cost thirty-seven thousand dollars—but within a few weeks Zündel reaped the yield from his investment in the form of a twenty-page document that eventually acquired near-Biblical stature among devout negationists. The bottom line of "The Leuchter Report"—sorry, no gas chambers at Auschwitz—rested upon the observation that there was no ventilation or exhaust equipment or gasketed seals, or even hydrogen-cyanide residue, amid the weathered ruins of the crematoria. ("I don't think the German S.S. had a death wish," Leuchter says in "Mr. Death," paraphrasing his inductive reasoning.) In Leuchter's jargon, the assembly line for the crime of the century is referred to only as "the alleged German execution gas chambers."

"The Leuchter Report" avers of Krema I at Auschwitz, "It would be sheer suicide to attempt to utilize this morgue as an execution gas chamber. The results would be an explosion or leaks gassing the entire camp." At a number of sites within Birkenau—most notably, the imploded, cavelike interior of Krema II and a building where Zyklon B, which was a trade name for the most convenient source of hydrogen cyanide, had been used to delouse inmates' clothing—Leuchter did something utterly appalling. Auschwitz-Birkenau is now a museum, and every day pilgrims to the crematoria recite memorial prayers and leave behind lighted candles and tiny wooden tablets inscribed with the names of Holocaust victims. This did not deter Leuchter from hacking away wherever he pleased with a hammer and a chisel. The video camera recorded his labors. Sometimes wearing a surgical mask and sometimes not, he gouged a wall here and a ceiling there, sealed the dislodged fragments in plastic bags, and offered a simultaneous narration that sounded like a parody of the old "Mr. Wizard" kids'-television program. When it came time to leave the country, he wrapped these souvenirs in his dirty laundry and concealed them in his luggage.

Back home, Leuchter delivered his plunder to a laboratory in Ashland, Massachusetts, and there a chemist named Jim Roth, unaware of the origin of the material, performed an analysis that found a significant level of cyanide in fragments removed from the delousing building but negligible or no traces in the specimens from the crematoria—proof, according to Leuchter's logic, that the mourners at Auschwitz have come to the wrong place. The most concise explanation to counter Leuchter's conclusion is that a much higher concentration of Zyklon B is required to kill lice than to kill human beings, and that the delousing building had remained intact while the crematoria, which were dismantled and dynamited by the Germans (or, in one case, by insurrectionist inmates) before the camp was liberated by the Allied forces, had been exposed to the elements for forty-three years before Leuchter came along. Nevertheless, Leuchter did much to reinforce a maxim favored by negationists: "Only lice were gassed in Auschwitz"—a slur that echoed, not coincidentally, Hitler's characterization of Jews as a plague of vermin.

MORRIS first became aware of Leuchter in 1990, when he was featured in a front-page *Times* story headlined "MAKING EXECUTION HUMANE (OR CAN IT BE?)." Only in passing, and well down in the article, did the *Times* mention Leuchter's role in the Zündel case. Though Morris immediately recognized Leuchter as a potential subject, he was occupied with other projects, and a year and a half elapsed before it occurred to him that Leuchter was living in Malden, not far from his own home, in Cambridge. He sent an assistant to a revisionist-affiliated gathering with instructions to introduce himself to Leuchter but not to ask many questions. The assistant wound up tape-recording an interview during which he couldn't get Leuchter to shut up—a phenomenon that Morris soon experienced at first hand, upon placing him in front of a camera.

The Leuchter saga seemed to offer Morris the chance to fulfill a long-nurtured ambition—"to make a Holocaust movie without reference to what other people have done." Morris thought about adding Leuchter to the menagerie of monomaniacs he'd gathered for "Fast, Cheap & Out of Control," a notion he abandoned when his wife advised, "Properly considered, Hitler is not a spice." I once asked Morris his opinion of "Schindler's List," and he said, "Spielberg has the interesting thesis that anybody can be a hero, whereas I have the far more interesting thesis that anybody can *think* he's a hero." It's an important Morris principle: we never truly know what we presume we know.

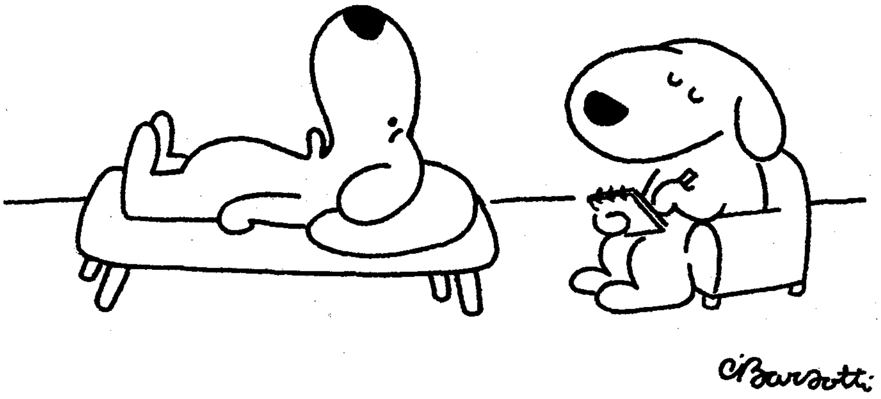
Not until a year ago did Morris finally have the funds, thanks to the Independent Film Channel and Britain's Channel 4, to create the movie he had in mind, and by then he was far from certain how to make sense of his subject. The Leuchter he had trotted out in an early fund-raising prospectus was a decidedly sinister figure—"an insidious force that must be examined closely so that his views can be challenged and, ultimately, he can be deterred." By the time Morris had secured the money, though, he realized that he had options more daring than representing his protagonist as evil. The story would be far more interesting if it plumbed the underlying mystery of Leuchter's identity and motivation. Had Zündel set him up? Was he a patsy? In any event, was there a risk that by giving a denier of the Holocaust a platform Morris would end up legitimatizing him? In the end, Morris elected to let Leuchter and other witnesses tell the story of "The Leuchter Report" in their own words: how it derailed Leuchter's life, how it became its author's tar baby—a piece of personal history from which he could never escape.

AT Zündel's 1988 trial, Leuchter was allowed to appear as an expert on contemporary gas-chamber design, and the findings from his Auschwitz journey, "The Leuchter Report," were submitted to the court on Hitler's birthday. A copy of the report was accepted as an informational exhibit, but not as evidence. After Leuchter took the stand, the judge stipulated that the Holocaust had in fact occurred. Zündel was again found guilty; on balance, Leuchter's testimony hadn't much mattered. What did matter was that "The Leuchter Report" survived beyond the trial. Indeed, today it can be downloaded from a Web site maintained by Zündel.

For a couple of years after the report's publication, Leuchter himself didn't seem to be doing badly. His execution-equipment business continued. He rebuilt Tennessee's electric chair and was retained as a consultant by the State of Florida after a bungled electrocution caused a condemned man's head to catch fire. And by now he had a legion of grateful admirers, whom he perhaps thought of as friends—members of the Holocaust-denial mob. Zündel, tantalized by the possibility of a series of sequels to "The Leuchter Report," sent him in 1989 on a tour of Dachau and other sites in Germany and Austria, during which he was joined by Faurisson and other prominent negationists. He was embraced by the loathsome British historian David Irving—described by Ron Rosenbaum, in his book "Explaining Hitler," as the Führer's "chief postwar defender"—who extolled the "gruesomely expert author" of "The Leuchter Report" and labelled its results "shattering" and "truly astounding."

Unavoidably, Leuchter became a target of Jewish activists, and it was only a matter of time before prison wardens stopped hiring him. In Massachusetts, he was prosecuted and threatened with jail for practicing engineering without a license. In 1992, he went to Germany, again to testify on Zündel's behalf (Zündel had been charged with violating Germany's Holocaust-denial statute after organizing an International Leuchter-Kongress in Munich); while there, he, too, made what the authorities deemed a Holocaust-denial speech. The next year, Leuchter was again lured to Germany, ostensibly to appear on television to talk about electrocution, but he was arrested the day he arrived and charged with "slander of the murdered Jews." He spent six and a half weeks in prison before he was finally bailed out by Zündel, and a trial was scheduled for 1994. He has never returned to Germany. Also, in 1994 his marriage came unravelled, whereupon he moved to California and, for a long while, as far as Morris was concerned, simply vanished.

ONE day last winter, I got a call from Morris, whom I'd written about previously, and for more than an hour, beginning at the beginning, he recited the tale of Leuchter thus far. No



"Oh, God, am I housebroken."

less compelling, I immediately felt, was the story of the story—Morris's pursuit of Leuchter, whom he'd tracked down by now with the help of a private detective, and his struggle with the implications of how his work-in-progress would portray its central figure. But how complicated could Leuchter be? Wasn't he a simple sower of foul deeds, a perpetrator of calculated cruelty? Morris perceived, instead, a "truly enigmatic character." Conspicuous Holocaust deniers occasionally get their homes or offices fire bombed or they get beaten up or, more often, they get sued or prosecuted; the potential for martyrdom clearly lends an allure to the enterprise. In the film, Leuchter comes across by turns as an accidental and defiant martyr, a banal but strange man launched on an inexorable, often hilariously grotesque, journey—a legend, as the saying goes, in his own mind.

Morris described to me the screening of an early rough cut at Harvard, which had left him shaken. "It seemed that that audience had no place to stand outside Fred," he said. "They became trapped in his ego. They took him quite literally. And when the film was over there were people in the room who wondered whether the Holocaust had really happened."

I asked Morris what he now thought about his subject. "On different days, I feel different things," he said. "Fred's story raises lots of interesting questions, such as: What happens if you really need to be loved and the only people who will love you are Nazis? And his version of what he saw in Auschwitz and what happened to him afterward seems to come right out of Nabokov—the clueless narrator, the narrator so far out of touch with what he's saying that it's totally absurd. But how clueless could he possibly be? That's the central mystery. Do we all live these self-invented fables? There's a deep mystery about why Fred's doing what he's doing, and for me it connects with the mystery of the Holocaust—the mystery not of whether it happened but of how it could happen. Is it happenstance that Fred, a person obsessed with death—not unlike me—ended up at Auschwitz? Somehow, he was drawn there, pulled to the center of twentieth-century death. And maybe it's pulling me, too. It's one of my predilections that people do not do evil knowingly. Evil is always construed as some form of doing good. We are always in some kind of delusional state about what our actions mean. I hope this movie becomes more effective if Fred emerges as more a person like you and me. If it's a movie that creates one more Manichaean illustration of good and evil, it becomes less interesting. If he becomes a person who makes us think about how the Holocaust came about, then it's useful."

SIX weeks later, in early April, I flew to Warsaw and then to Kraków, was driven an hour or so to the small Polish city of Tychy, and checked into the hotel where Morris and his film crew were staying. Later that afternoon, I proceeded to Birkenau, three kilometres from the original camp—Auschwitz I, on the outskirts of the village that after the war reclaimed its Polish name, Oświęcim. The content of the film hadn't progressed beyond the rough cut that had been screened at Harvard, but, if all went well, by the time Morris left Poland he would have filled many of its most perilous gaps. These gaps, I recognized when I viewed the rough cut at the hotel, existed as a function of Leuchter's dorky charm. He possessed an unsettling, earnest forthrightness—the capacity to trigger cognitive dissonance. A lot of what Leuchter had to say was dangerously off-the-wall, and Morris was well on his way toward creating yet another compulsively watchable movie.

Since arriving, three days earlier, Morris had spent his time scouting locations. He was trying to acquire a ground-level sense of a vast place he'd previously been familiar with mainly through the images of Leuchter's ten-year-old videotape; he wanted to film scenes, using actors, that would reënact that bizarre home movie. In other words, he would repeat what he first did with great success in "The Thin Blue Line"—create stylized dramatic reproductions of real-life events. In the final film, these scenes would be juxtaposed with the Leuchter videotape, which Morris had once described to me as "the most surreal piece of film I've ever seen," and he had added, "Move over, Mr. Buñuel. Nice try, but you have competition." Morris's schedule called for two full weeks of shooting. He planned to photograph blueprints and other documents in the Auschwitz museum archives—to introduce explicit references to the existence of the gas chambers (and to the inadequacy of Leuchter's argument). And he would interview a Dutch-born historian, Robert Jan van Pelt, an authority on the camp's genealogy and evolution into a death factory and the co-author of a book entitled "Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present," published in 1996.

That first afternoon, van Pelt and I walked along a path parallel to railroad tracks that entered the main gate of Birkenau and terminated half a mile later. On our right was a perimeter of barbed wire, and, beyond that, twenty wooden barracks, which gave way to an endless gridwork of brick chimneys—a ghostscape that remained wherever the barracks had come down. On our left was another border of barbed wire, then brick barracks, and, in the distance, the Carpathian Mountains. At last, we reached a crossroads, the spot at which trains dispatched from all over Europe by Adolf Eichmann had been halted and new arrivals were lined up—mothers, children, and the elderly here, able-bodied men and women there. This was where the infamous "selections" had taken place, where the S.S. literally expropriated the divine prerogative: deciding who shall live and who shall die. From this nexus, at the height of the gassings, in 1943 and 1944, the doomed would be consigned to the crematoria and, typically, would be dead within a couple of hours.

"If I had to create a geography of evil, this would certainly be my center point," van Pelt said. "Many people consider this the most important place in their life. I'm not a Catholic, but I wouldn't go into a Catholic Church and piss on the altar. There are standards of human decency. Fred Leuchter came here for two or three days and took samples. I don't want to deny people the right to doubt. But I want them to do it after they've done their homework; I hate Holocaust deniers not just for their moral atrociousness but because they're sloppy craftsmen. I walk around here and I still find things that I don't understand—why they're here. This is an enormous place. This is a city. Originally, there were a hundred and twenty-five architects and draftsmen working here. Why would one or two people think they can come here and in two or three days understand this place?"

THE next morning, Morris shot footage inside one of the three remaining delousing buildings, including a disquisition by van Pelt, who posed in front of what he sardonically called "the Wailing Wall of Holocaust deniers"—the spot from which Leuchter had chiselled material that turned out to possess a relatively high cyanide content; this became the control against which other samples from the "alleged gas chambers" were measured. Walking through the delousing building in midmorning, I inadvertently interrupted a scene from Morris's reënactment of the Leuchter videotape. Either as punishment or as reward, Morris decided that I was photogenic enough to be cast as Leuchter's video cameraman. "Remember," he told me as I was being outfitted with a parka and a prop camera, "you'll never again get to be in a Holocaust-denial film." One of the producers, David Collins, who had assumed the role of Leuchter, wore a Russian-style hat with earflaps and a sheepherder's coat of cocoa-brown leather with fake fleece. Verisimilitude was possible because Leuchter had worn this very garment ten years earlier and had lent it to the filmmakers—an impenetrable gesture of complicity. (How could Leuchter grasp what Morris was actually up to?)

Later that day, after touring the crematoria, I wound up a couple of hours before sunset at Krema II. Powerful klieg lights were perched on the collapsed roof of what had been an underground gas chamber, next to an opening slightly larger than a manhole. Morris, his cinematographer, and David Collins-as-Leuchter had descended through this doorway to hell, just as Leuchter himself had done ten years before. While they worked, the rest of us, at ground level, distracted ourselves with mildly nervous kibbitzing. Or else we wandered about on our own, discovering in the passages of silence the sneaky way that the imagination will try to wrap itself around the unimaginable. In the near distance, beyond the birches along the Birkenau perimeter, I could hear roosters crowing, dogs barking, a chainsaw, and the sounds of children playing in the back yards of farmhouses that had been built after the war with bricks salvaged from the crematoria.

At dinner that night, back at the hotel, Morris and I talked about his reënactments from the Leuchter videotape. "Because Fred uses a handheld camera and shoots with available light, his film is somehow authentic, vérité-in-a-nutshell, 'true' cinema," Morris said. "The irony here is that his cinéma vérité is in the service of falsehood. And my contrived material, I like to think, is in the service of the underlying truth"—a two-beat pause—"but, of course, I could be wrong."

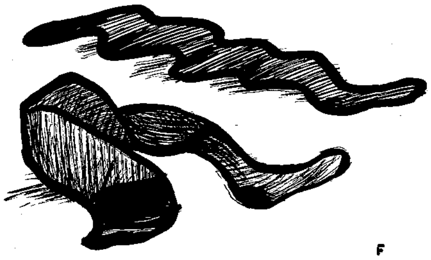
And what was one to make of David Collins, who, as the Leuchter doppelgänger, wore a surgical mask? On camera, Leuchter had explained that he wore a mask so as not to contaminate his specimens. "On the videotape, he actually neglected to wear the mask ninety per cent of the time," Morris observed.

"I guess what you're saying is that Holocaust denial isn't an exact science," I proposed.

"Yes, you're right," Morris said. "It isn't a science at all. It's an art."

AFTER returning from Auschwitz to Cambridge, Morris had a sinking spell. In recent years, he has supported his filmmaking by directing television commercials, and now, studying the footage of Auschwitz, he began to worry that it looked like "product." As the summer and the editing progressed, however, he grew more sanguine. He interviewed Leuchter again—their first meeting since 1992. It was a twelve-hour session, at the end of which Leuchter gave the impression that he could have talked for twelve more. "I always thought I could outlast any person I've been interviewing," Morris told me. "But I've met my match."

In September, he invited me to watch a day of shooting, which began in an apartment building in Revere, a suburb north of Boston. Leuchter was present, bantering with the crew, preparing to reënact scenes from his own life. I asked Morris, "Does Fred know yet what this film is about?"



"I don't know yet what this film is about," he replied.

The first scene that day—one that wouldn't survive the cutting room—depicted Leuchter's experience in 1994, when he was evicted from a hotel that had been his home in Los Angeles. While another shot was being set up, he relaxed in the living room of an apartment that had been rented as a location. He wore a short-sleeved yellow dress shirt, a brown necktie, cuffless beige chinos, beige socks, and white loafers. Gulping away at his daily coffee quota, he worked around to one of his favorite topics: botched executions. From a riff about a Florida convict who had to be physically subdued before he could be brought to the electric chair, he shifted to Louisiana: "I was looking at the autopsy photos and I could see damage to the heads of the executees. They were screwing self-tapping screws directly into a person's skull to get a good contact for the electrodes, and they did this while the executee was conscious."

"Isn't Fred a sweetie?" Morris said to me after Leuchter had moved into the bedroom for the next scene. It was a peculiar rhetorical question, undoubtedly sincere and yet—what? Morris was making a film that would have what effect upon Leuchter's life? Could the film possibly enhance it? And Leuchter had presumably agreed to coöperate because he was being treated like a very important person. Morris seemed to hang on his every word, was recounting the narrative of his undoing, for the purpose of—again, what? At one point, Leuchter said to me, "Every time I stick my head up, I get shot at." The world was a hostile, dangerous place—he'd genuinely feared for his life while imprisoned in Germany—yet he seemed remarkably guileless. (Hence: Isn't Fred a sweetie?)

On another day's shooting, between takes, Morris said, "Fred hasn't questioned anything we've asked him to do over the last five days. I haven't lied about anything. I haven't had to; he's too honest and decent a man. I look over all this and I think he's just misguided. He got mixed up with the wrong group of people. There are people who think he's evil, but he's not. The movie, I think, is becoming a kind of odd danse macabre, with Leuchter as my brand of existential hero, or, if you like, existential antihero—the completely benighted human being who still deserves our sympathy." The filming that day lasted twelve hours—until three-thirty in the morning, by which time everyone on the set except Morris and Leuchter was desperate to go home. Leuchter never flagged. Not only was he an actor but Morris had turned him into a major-minor movie star. "Cinéma vérité!" Morris exulted after one successful take. "The camera loves Fred!"

Perhaps so, I thought at that moment. Something or someone surely must love Fred Leuchter, though neither love nor any form of penitence I could imagine would erase the stain of his most noteworthy achievement—careering from one mass-murder site to another with a busted moral compass, along the way bringing joy to truly depraved people who were determined to obliterate the most basic truths about the crimes of the Third Reich.

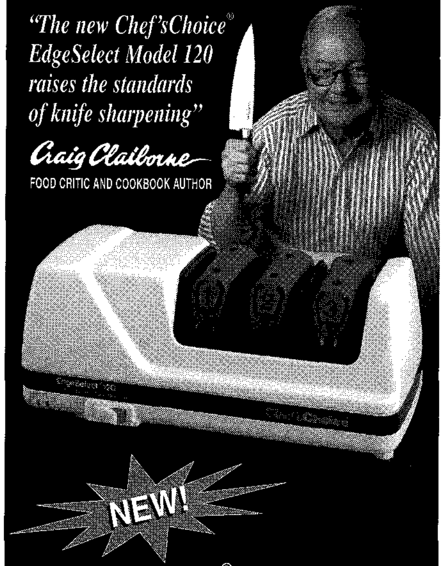
DURING the making of "Mr. Death," Morris augmented his usual complement of anxieties with a sense of dread at what might happen when he showed Leuchter the completed film. In addition to van Pelt, Morris had enlisted Jim Roth—the chemist who had analyzed Leuchter's forensic evidence—as a rebuttal witness. Only after he testified at Zündel's trial, Roth told Morris, did he realize where the material he analyzed had originated. He acknowledged the limitation of his analysis: cyanide, by its molecular nature, would have bonded with the iron in the brick of the gas chambers only on the surface—ten microns deep, just one-tenth the diameter of a human hair. Thus, when a chunk of brick was crushed in the lab, the material beneath the surface would have diluted the specimen, rendering the test pointless. Looking into Morris's camera, Roth summarized, "I don't think the Leuchter results have any meaning."

Finally, on the morning of New Year's Eve, Morris and Michael Williams, one of his producers, invited Leuchter to a very private screening of the version of the movie that would be shown at the Sundance Film Festival. "The reason to show it to him was, on a very simple level, so he wouldn't feel blindsided when the film is released," Morris said. During the eighty-three minutes the film was running, Leuchter was atypically silent. Afterward, he announced that he liked it very much, though he objected to statements made by van Pelt and Roth.

At one point, Leuchter reversed roles and asked Morris, "What is the film about to you?"

"It's a good question," Morris said, laughing. "What it is about is my curiosity—how you got yourself into this fix."

This sounded like a euphemistic version of an essential tenet in the Morris epistemology—"the fundamental Cartesian error: the notion that people have privileged access to their own minds." It didn't bother him in the least that seeing the movie hadn't altered any of Leuchter's basic opinions. "Nor did I want to try to convince him that the Holocaust happened," Morris told me later. "Say I did get him to admit that poison gas was used, that there were gas chambers at Auschwitz—so what? Would that make me any different from Zündel? Would he be saying all this because he wanted to please me? Would I have become a new friend, a new interest group—instead of the neo-Nazi group, the filmmaker-group-making-a-film-about-a-neo-Nazi group? All along, I viewed Leuchter as such a tangled mixture. There's not just one person there. There's Fred as self-invented American, Fred as entrepreneur, Fred as Sherlock Holmes, looking for the telltale trace that reveals the meaning of the world. He's the Florence Nightingale of death row. When he testifies for Zündel, he's the champion of free speech, the civil libertarian, the humanist, humanitarian, seeker of truth, martyr. By the end, there's Fred as fall guy, Fred as victim of the Jews. When he talks about how at Auschwitz he was afraid of the guards, how he had an escape plan in case he got caught—it's as if he were talking about himself as a Jew in 1943 or 1944, rather than as a Holocaust denier vandalizing the site. So, in the end, I'm left with the question 'Do I know who Fred is?' Plus one other question, which I assume will stay with me for a while: 'Do I know who I am myself?' " ♦



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ANNALS OF MEDICINE

WHEN DOCTORS MAKE MISTAKES

The real problem isn't how to stop bad doctors from harming, even killing, their patients. It's how to prevent good doctors from doing so.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

I—CRASH VICTIM

At 2 A.M. on a crisp Friday in winter, I was in sterile gloves and gown, pulling a teenage knifing victim's abdomen open, when my pager sounded. "Code Trauma, three minutes," the operating-room nurse said, reading aloud from my pager display. This meant that an ambulance would be bringing another trauma patient to the hospital momentarily, and, as the surgical resident on duty for emergencies, I would have to be present for the patient's arrival. I stepped back from the table and took off my gown. Two other surgeons were working on the knifing victim: Michael Ball, the attending (the staff surgeon in charge of the case), and David Hernandez, the chief resident (a general surgeon in his last of five years of training). Ordinarily, these two would have come later to help with the trauma, but they were stuck here. Ball, a dry, imperturbable forty-two-year-old Texan, looked over to me as I headed for the door. "If you run into any trouble, you call, and one of us will peel away," he said.

I did run into trouble. In telling this story, I have had to change significant details about what happened (including the names of the participants and aspects of my role), but I have tried to stay as close to the actual events as I could while protecting the patient, myself, and the rest of the staff. The way that things go wrong in medicine is normally unseen and, consequently, often misunderstood. Mistakes do happen. We think of them as aberrant; they are anything but.

The emergency room was one floor up, and, taking the stairs two at a time, I arrived just as the emergency medical technicians wheeled in a woman who appeared to be in her thirties and to weigh more than two hundred pounds. She lay motionless on a hard orange plastic spinal board—eyes closed, skin pale, blood running out of her nose. A nurse directed the crew into Trauma Bay 1, an examination room outfitted like an O.R., with green tiles on the wall, monitoring devices, and space for portable X-ray equipment. We lifted her onto the bed and then went to work. One nurse began cutting off the woman's clothes. Another took vital signs. A third inserted a large-bore intravenous line into her right arm. A surgical intern put a Foley catheter into her bladder. The emergency-medicine attending was Samuel Johns, a gaunt, Ichabod Crane-like man in his fifties. He was standing to one side with his arms crossed, observing, which was a sign that I could go ahead and take charge.

If you're in a hospital, most of the "moment to moment" doctoring you get is from residents—physicians receiving specialty training and a small income in exchange for their labor. Our responsibilities depend on our level of training, but we're never entirely on our own: there's always an attending, who oversees our decisions. That night, since Johns was the attending and was responsible for the patient's immediate management, I took my lead from him. But he wasn't a surgeon, and so he relied on me for surgical expertise.

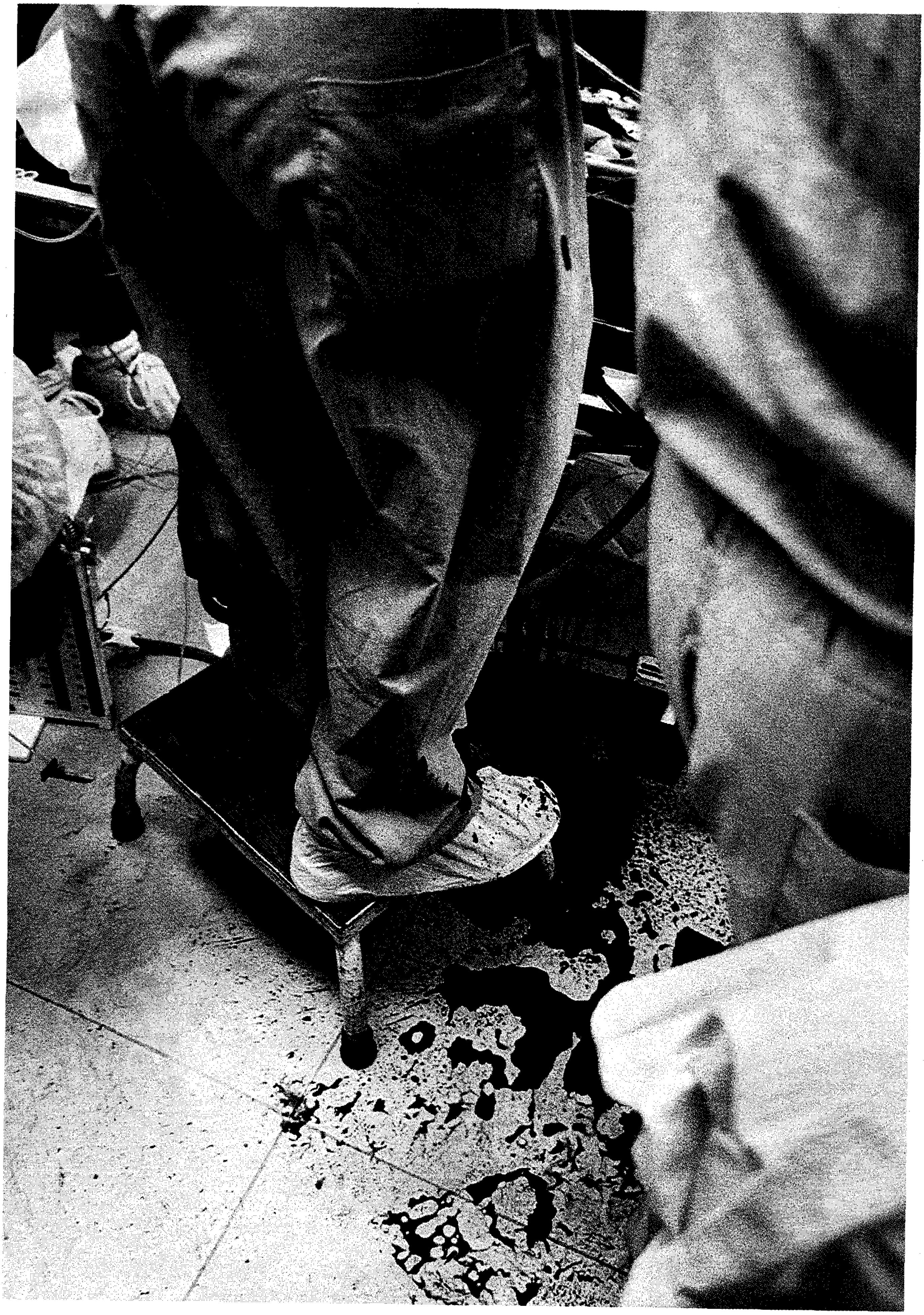
"What's the story?" I asked.

An E.M.T. rattled off the details: "Unidentified white female unrestrained driver in high-speed rollover. Ejected from the car. Found unresponsive to pain. Pulse a hundred, B.P. a hundred over sixty, breathing at thirty on her own . . . "

As he spoke, I began examining her. The first step in caring for a trauma patient is always the same. It doesn't matter if a person has been shot eleven times or crushed by a truck or burned in a kitchen fire. The first thing you do is make sure that the patient can breathe without difficulty. This woman's breaths were shallow and rapid. An oximeter, by means of a sensor placed on her finger, measured the oxygen saturation of her blood. The "O_2 sat" is normally more than ninety-five per cent for a patient breathing room air. The woman was wearing a face mask with oxygen turned up full blast, and her sat was only ninety per cent.

"She's not oxygenating well," I an-

Physicians are meeting behind closed doors in hospitals all over the country to talk candidly about their sometimes deadly errors.



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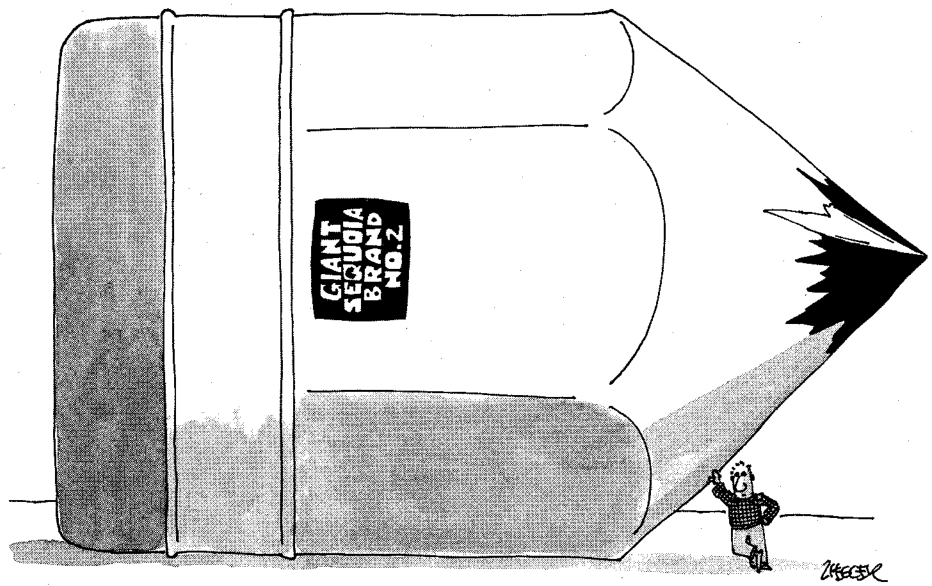

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nounced in the flattened-out, wake-me-up-when-something-interesting-happens tone that all surgeons have acquired by about three months into residency. With my fingers, I verified that there wasn't any object in her mouth that would obstruct her airway; with a stethoscope, I confirmed that neither lung had collapsed. I got hold of a bag mask, pressed its clear facepiece over her nose and mouth, and squeezed the bellows, a kind of balloon with a one-way valve, shooting a litre of air into her with each compression. After a minute or so, her oxygen came up to a comfortable ninety-eight per cent. She obviously needed our help with breathing. "Let's tube her," I said. That meant putting a tube down through her vocal cords and into her trachea, which would insure a clear airway and allow for mechanical ventilation.

Johns, the attending, wanted to do the intubation. He picked up a Mac 3 laryngoscope, a standard but fairly primitive-looking L-shaped metal instrument for prying open the mouth and throat, and slipped the shoehornlike blade deep into her mouth and down to her larynx. Then he yanked the handle up toward the ceiling to pull her tongue out of the way, open her mouth and throat, and reveal the vocal cords, which sit like fleshy tent flaps at the entrance to the trachea. The patient didn't wince or gag: she was still out cold.

"Suction!" he called. "I can't see a thing."

He sucked out about a cup of blood and clot. Then he picked up the endotracheal tube—a clear rubber pipe about the diameter of an index finger and three times as long—and tried to guide it between her cords. After a minute, her sat started to fall.

"You're down to seventy per cent," a nurse announced.

Johns kept struggling with the tube, trying to push it in, but it banged vainly against the cords. The patient's lips began to turn blue.

"Sixty per cent," the nurse said.

Johns pulled everything out of the patient's mouth and fitted the bag mask back on. The oximeter's luminescent-green readout hovered at sixty for a moment and then rose steadily, to ninety-seven per cent. After a few minutes, he took the mask off and again tried to get the tube in. There was more blood, and there may have been some swelling, too: all the poking down the throat was probably not helping. The sat fell to sixty per cent. He pulled out and bagged her until she returned to ninety-five per cent.

When you're having trouble getting the tube in, the next step is to get specialized expertise. "Let's call anesthesia," I said, and Johns agreed. In the meantime, I continued to follow the standard trauma protocol: completing the examination and ordering fluids, lab tests, and X-rays. Maybe five minutes passed as I worked.

The patient's sats drifted down to ninety-two per cent—not a dramatic change but definitely not normal for a patient who is being manually ventilated. I checked to see if the sensor had slipped off her finger. It hadn't. "Is the oxygen up full blast?" I asked a nurse.

"It's up all the way," she said.

I listened again to the patient's lungs—no collapse. "We've got to get her tubed," Johns said. He took off the oxygen mask and tried again.

Somewhere in my mind, I must have been aware of the possibility that her airway was shutting down because of vocal-cord swelling or blood. If it was, and we were unable to get a tube in, then the only chance she'd have to survive would be an emergency tracheostomy: cutting a hole in her neck and inserting a breathing tube into her trachea. Another attempt to intubate her might even trigger a spasm of the cords and a sudden closure of the airway—which is exactly what did happen.

If I had actually thought this far along, I would have recognized how ill-prepared I was to do an emergency "trache." Of the people in the room, it's true, I had the most experience doing tracheostomies, but that wasn't saying much. I had been the assistant surgeon in only about half a dozen, and all but one of them had been non-emergency cases, employing techniques that were not designed for speed. The exception was a practice emergency trache I had done on a goat. I should have immediately called Dr. Ball for backup. I should have got the trache equipment out—lighting, suction, sterile instruments—just in case. Instead of hurrying the effort to get the patient intubated because of a mild drop in saturation, I should have asked Johns to wait until I had help nearby. I might even have recognized that she was already losing her airway. Then I could have grabbed a knife and started cutting her a tracheostomy while things were still relatively stable and I had time to proceed slowly. But for whatever reasons—hubris, inattention, wishful thinking, hesitation, or the uncertainty of the moment—I let the opportunity pass.

Johns hunched over the patient, intently trying to insert the tube through her vocal cords. When her sat once again dropped into the sixties, he stopped and put the mask back on. We stared at the monitor. The numbers weren't coming up. Her lips were still blue. Johns squeezed the bellows harder to blow more oxygen in.

"I'm getting resistance," he said.

The realization crept over me: this was a disaster. "Damn it, we've lost her airway," I said. "Trache kit! Light! Somebody call down to O.R. 25 and get Ball up here!"

People were suddenly scurrying everywhere. I tried to proceed deliberately, and not let panic take hold. I told the surgical intern to get a sterile gown and gloves on. I took a bactericidal solution off a shelf and dumped a whole bottle of yellow-brown liquid on the patient's neck. A nurse unwrapped the tracheostomy kit—a sterilized set of drapes and instruments. I pulled on a gown and a new pair of gloves while trying to think through the steps. This is simple, really, I tried to tell myself. At the base of the thyroid cartilage, the Adam's apple, is a little gap in which you find a thin, fibrous covering called the cricothyroid membrane. Cut through that and—voilà! You're in the trachea. You slip through the hole a four-inch plastic tube shaped like a plumber's elbow joint, hook it up to oxygen and a ventilator, and she's all set. Anyway, that was the theory.

I threw some drapes over her body, leaving the neck exposed. It looked as thick as a tree. I felt for the bony prominence of the thyroid cartilage. But I couldn't feel anything through the rolls of fat. I was beset by uncertainty—where should I cut? should I make a horizontal or a vertical incision?—and I hated myself for it. Surgeons never dithered, and I was dithering.

"I need better light," I said.

Someone was sent out to look for one.

"Did anyone get Ball?" I asked. It wasn't exactly an inspiring question.

"He's on his way," a nurse said.

There wasn't time to wait. Four minutes without oxygen would lead to permanent brain damage, if not death. Finally, I took the scalpel and cut. I just cut. I made a three-inch left-to-right swipe across the middle of the neck, following the procedure I'd learned for elective cases. I figured that if I worked through the fat I might be able to find the membrane in the wound. Dissecting down with scissors while the intern held the wound open with retractors, I hit a vein. It didn't let loose a lot of blood, but there was enough to fill the wound: I couldn't see anything. The intern put a finger on the bleeder. I called for suction. But the suction wasn't working; the tube was clogged with the clot from the intubation efforts.

"Somebody get some new tubing," I said. "And where's the light?"

Finally, an orderly wheeled in a tall overhead light, plugged it in, and flipped on the switch. It was still too dim; I could have done better with a flashlight.

I wiped up the blood with gauze, then felt around in the wound with my fingertips. This time, I thought I could feel the hard ridges of the thyroid cartilage and, below it, the slight gap of the cricothyroid membrane, though I couldn't be sure. I held my place with my left hand.

James O'Connor, a silver-haired, seen-it-all anesthesiologist, came into the room. Johns gave him a quick rundown on the patient and let him take over bagging her.

Holding the scalpel in my right hand like a pen, I stuck the blade down into the wound at the spot where I thought the thyroid cartilage was. With small, sharp strokes—working blindly, because of the blood and the poor light—I cut down through the overlying fat and tissue until I felt the blade scrape against the almost bony cartilage. I searched with the tip of the knife, walking it along until I felt it reach a gap. I hoped it was the cricothyroid membrane, and pressed down firmly. Then I felt the tissue suddenly give, and I cut an inch-long opening.

When I put my index finger into it, it felt as if I were prying open the jaws of a stiff clothespin. Inside, I thought I felt open space. But where were the sounds of moving air that I expected? Was this deep enough? Was I even in the right place?

"I think I'm in," I said, to reassure myself as much as anyone else.

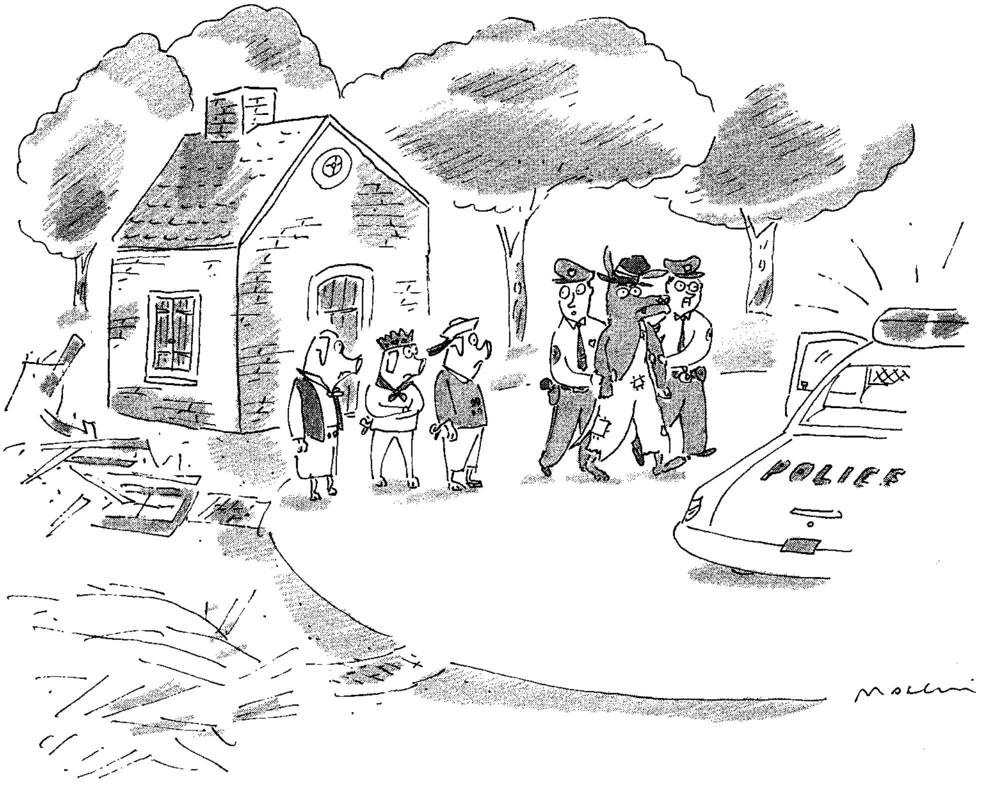
"I hope so," O'Connor said. "She doesn't have much longer."

I took the tracheostomy tube and tried to fit it in, but something seemed to be blocking it. I twisted it and turned it, and finally jammed it in. Just then, Ball, the surgical attending, arrived. He rushed up to the bed and leaned over for a look. "Did you get it?" he asked. I said that I thought so. The bag mask was plugged onto the open end of the trache tube. But when the bellows were compressed the air just gurgled out of the wound. Ball quickly put on gloves and a gown.

"How long has she been without an airway?" he asked.

"I don't know. Three minutes."

Ball's face hardened as he registered that he had about a minute in which to turn things around. He took my place and summarily pulled out the trache tube. "God, what a mess," he said. "I can't see a thing in this wound. I don't even know if you're in the right place. Can we



"He's big, all right, and he's definitely a wolf, but it'll be up to a jury to decide whether or not he's bad."

get better light and suction?" New suction tubing was found and handed to him. He quickly cleaned up the wound and went to work.

The patient's sat had dropped so low that the oximeter couldn't detect it anymore. Her heart rate began slowing down—first to the sixties and then to the forties. Then she lost her pulse entirely. I put my hands together on her chest, locked my elbows, leaned over her, and started doing chest compressions.

Ball looked up from the patient and turned to O'Connor. "I'm not going to get her an airway in time," he said. "You're going to have to try from above." Essentially, he was admitting my failure. Trying an oral intubation again was pointless—just something to do instead of watching her die. I was stricken, and concentrated on doing chest compressions, not looking at anyone. It was over, I thought.

And then, amazingly, O'Connor: "I'm in." He had managed to slip a pediatric-size endotracheal tube through the vocal cords. In thirty seconds, with oxygen being manually ventilated through the tube, her heart was back, racing at a hundred and twenty beats a minute. Her sat registered at sixty and then climbed. Another thirty seconds and it was at ninety-seven per cent. All the people in the room exhaled, as if they, too, had been denied their breath. Ball and I said little except to confer about the next steps for her. Then he went back downstairs to finish working on the stab-wound patient still in the O.R.

We eventually identified the woman, whom I'll call Louise Williams; she was thirty-four years old and lived alone in a nearby suburb. Her alcohol level on arrival had been three times the legal limit, and had probably contributed to her unconsciousness. She had a concussion, several lacerations, and significant soft-tissue damage. But X-rays and scans revealed no other injuries from the crash. That night, Ball and Hernandez brought her to the O.R. to fit her with a proper tracheostomy. When Ball came out and talked to family members, he told them of the dire condition she was in when she arrived, the difficulties "we" had had getting access to her airway, the disturbingly long period of time that she had gone without oxygen, and thus his uncertainty about how much brain function she still possessed. They listened without protest; there was nothing for them to do but wait.

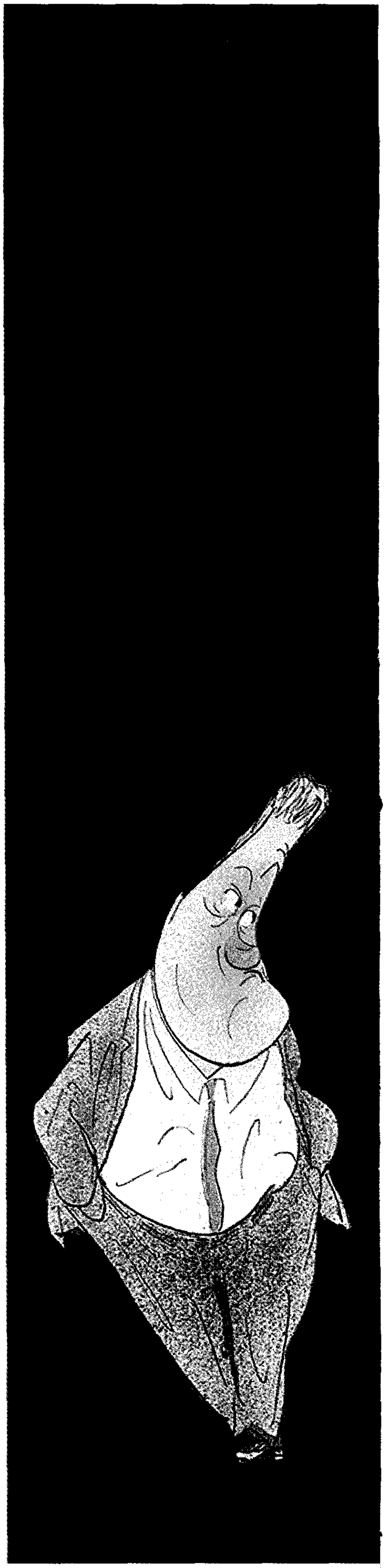
II—THE BANALITY OF ERROR

To much of the public—and certainly to lawyers and the media—medical error is a problem of bad physicians. Consider some other surgical mishaps. In one, a general surgeon left a large metal instrument in a patient's abdomen, where it tore through the bowel and the wall of the bladder. In another, a cancer surgeon biopsied the wrong part of a woman's breast and thereby delayed her diagnosis of cancer for months. A cardiac surgeon skipped a small but key step during a heart-valve operation, thereby killing the patient. A surgeon saw a man racked with abdominal pain in the emergency room and, without taking a C.T. scan, assumed that the man had a kidney stone; eighteen hours later, a scan showed a rupturing abdominal aortic aneurysm, and the patient died not long afterward.

How could anyone who makes a mistake of that magnitude be allowed to practice medicine? We call such doctors "incompetent," "unethical," and "negligent." We want to see them punished. And so we've wound up with the public system we have for dealing with error: malpractice lawsuits, media scandal, suspensions, firings.

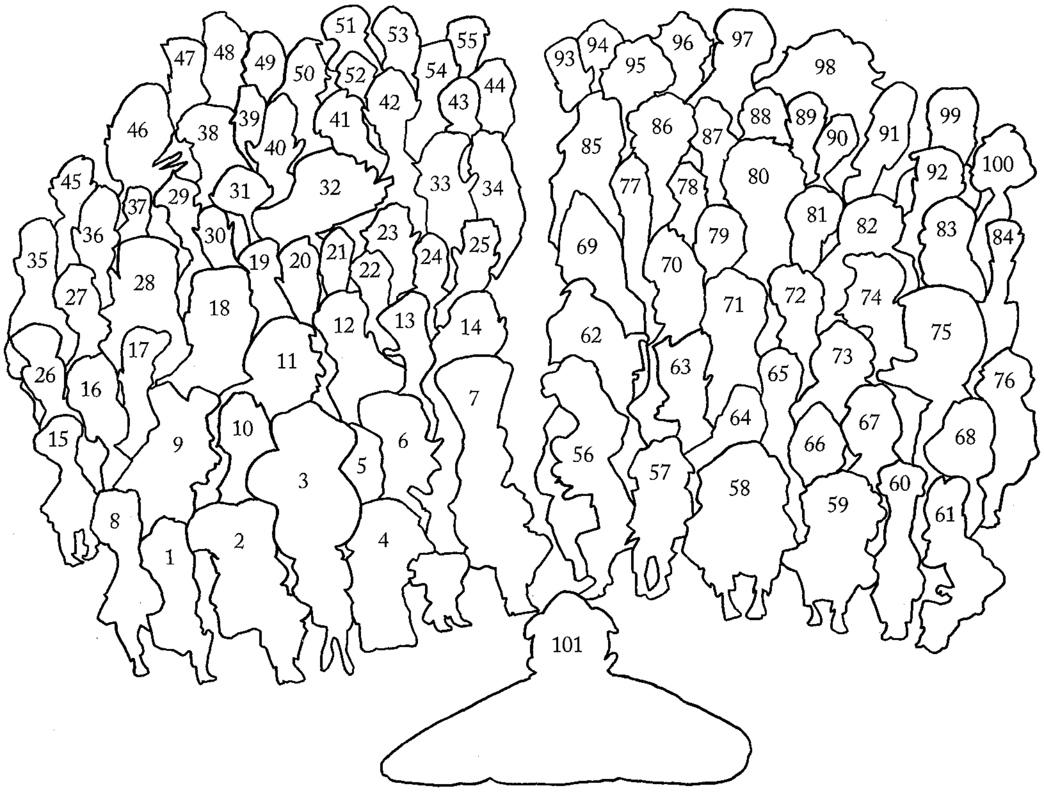
There is, however, a central truth in medicine that complicates this tidy vision of misdeeds and misdoers: *all* doctors make terrible mistakes. Consider the cases I've just described. I gathered them simply by asking respected surgeons I know—surgeons at top medical schools—to tell me about mistakes they had made just in the past year. Every one of them had a story to tell.

In 1991, *The New England Journal of Medicine* published a series of landmark papers from a project known as the Harvard Medical Practice Study—a review of more than thirty thousand hospital admissions in New York State. The study found that nearly four per cent of hospital patients suffered complications from treatment which prolonged their hospital stay or resulted in disability or death, and that two-thirds of such complications were due to errors in care. One in four, or one per cent of admissions, involved actual negligence. It was estimated that, nationwide, a hundred and twenty thousand patients die each year at least partly



101 DAMNATIONS

BY STEVE BRODNER



REPUBLICANS—LEFT SIDE

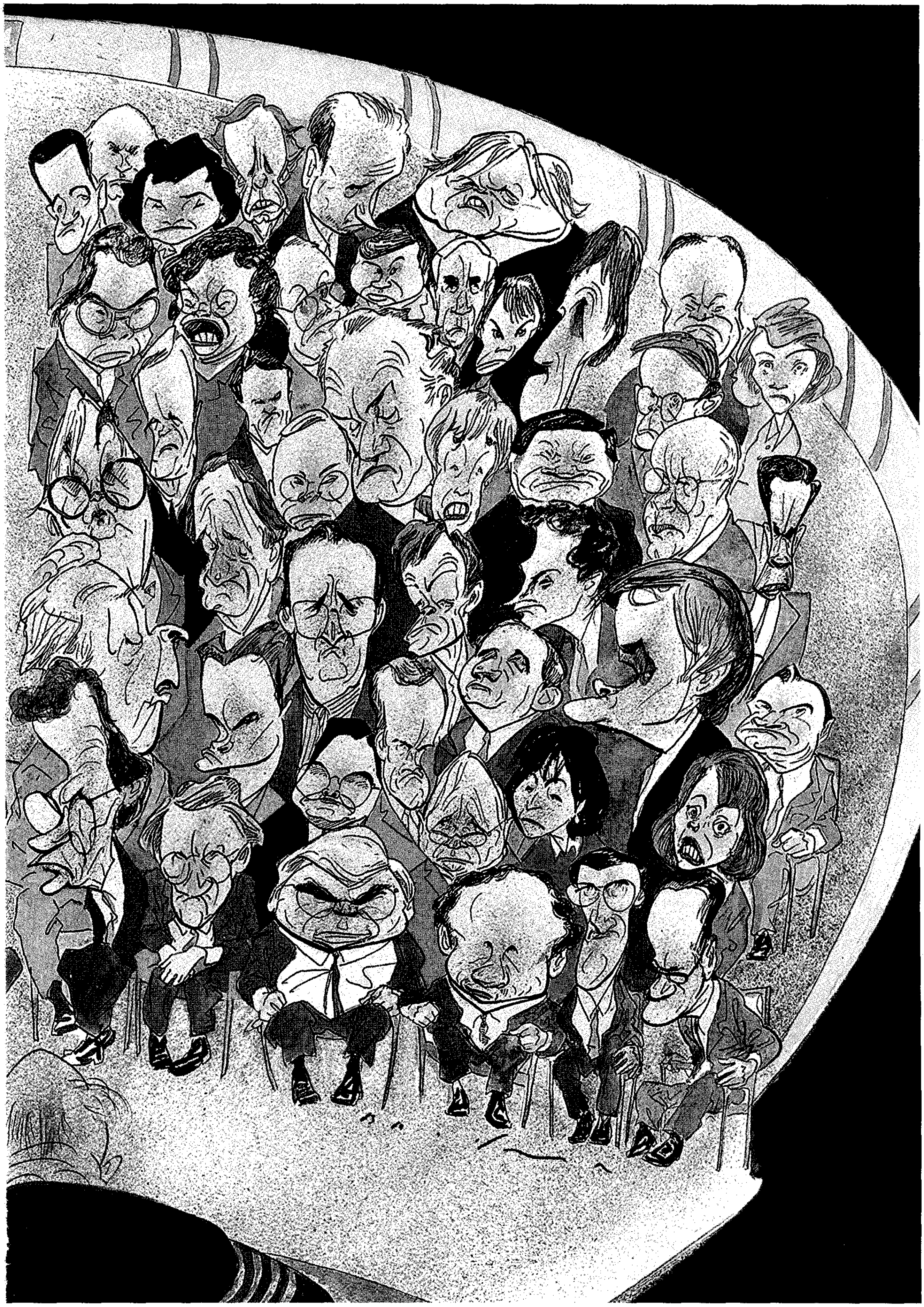
1. Peter Fitzgerald, Ill.
2. Spencer Abraham, Mich.
3. Kay Bailey Hutchison, Texas
4. Strom Thurmond, S.C.
5. Chuck Grassley, Iowa
6. Don Nickles, Majority Whip, Okla.
7. Trent Lott, Majority Leader, Miss.
8. Connie Mack, Fla.
9. John Warner, Va.
10. Thad Cochran, Miss.
11. Pete Domenici, N.M.
12. William Roth, Jr., Del.
13. Judd Gregg, N.H.
14. Ted Stevens, Alaska
15. Wayne Allard, Colo.
16. Susan Collins, Maine
17. Sam Brownback, Kans.
18. Bob Smith, N.H.
19. Chuck Hagel, Neb.
20. Frank Murkowski, Alaska
21. Pat Roberts, Kans.
22. Jim Bunning, Ky.
23. Mike DeWine, Ohio
24. John McCain, Ariz.
25. Rick Santorum, Pa.
26. Richard Lugar, Ind.
27. Arlen Specter, Pa.
28. John Ashcroft, Mo.
29. Slade Gorton, Wash.
30. George Voinovich, Ohio
31. Orrin Hatch, Utah
32. Phil Gramm, Texas
33. Jesse Helms, N.C.
34. Christopher Bond, Mo.
35. Craig Thomas, Wyo.
36. Larry Craig, Idaho
37. Mike Crapo, Idaho
38. John Chafee, R.I.
39. Conrad Burns, Mont.
40. Robert Bennett, Utah
41. Paul Coverdell, Ga.
42. James Jeffords, Vt.
43. Gordon Smith, Ore.
44. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Colo.
45. Jeff Sessions, Ala.
46. Olympia Snowe, Maine
47. Bill Frist, Tenn.
48. Mitch McConnell, Ky.
49. Jon Kyl, Ariz.
50. Mike Enzi, Wyo.
51. Fred Thompson, Tenn.
52. James Inhofe, Okla.
53. Richard Shelby, Ala.
54. Rod Grams, Minn.
55. Tim Hutchinson, Ark.

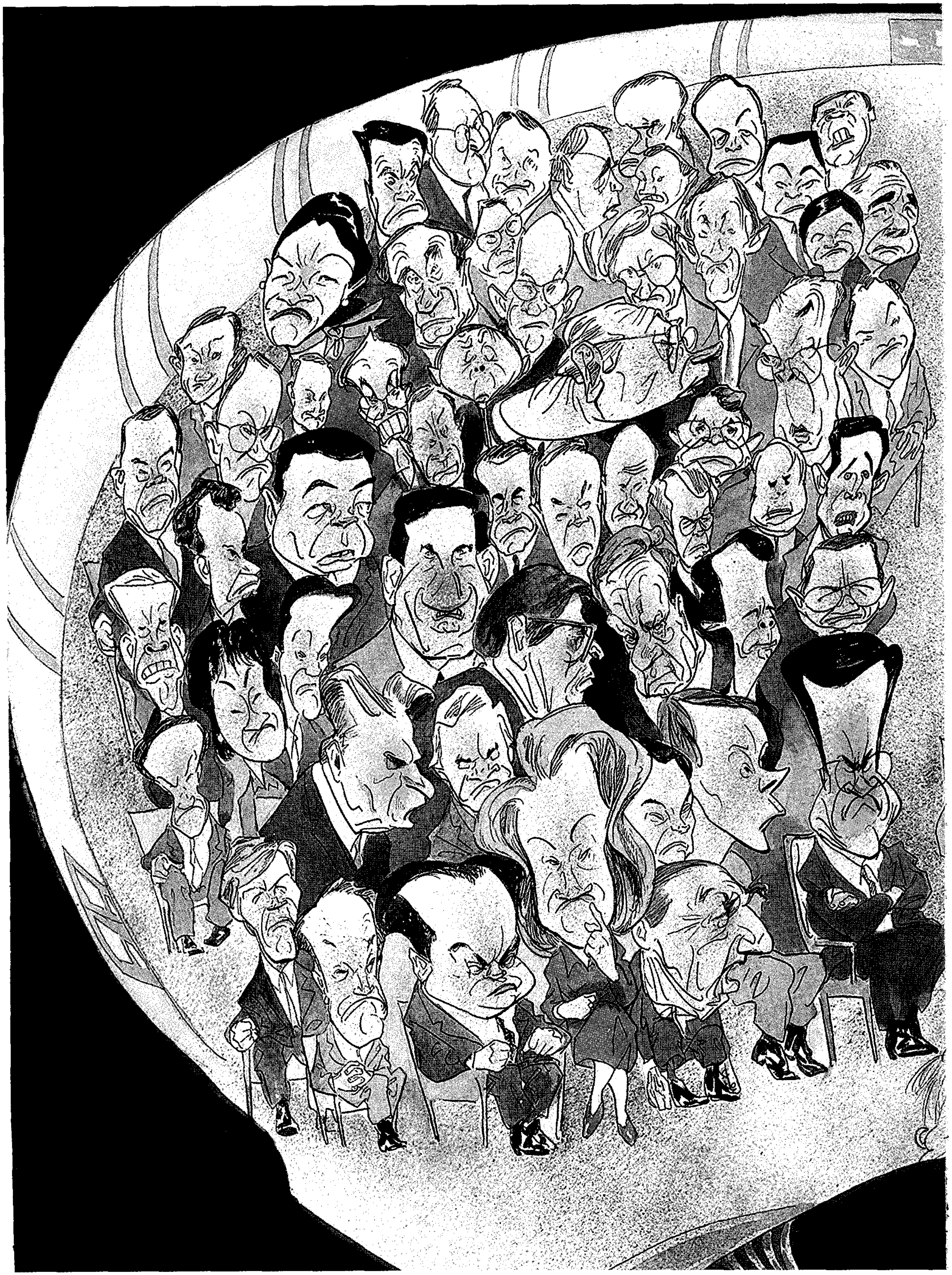
DEMOCRATS—RIGHT SIDE

56. Tom Daschle, Democratic Leader, S.D.
57. Harry Reid, Democratic Whip, Nev.
58. Christopher Dodd, Conn.
59. Paul Wellstone, Minn.
60. Kent Conrad, N.D.
61. Charles Schumer, N.Y.
62. Robert Byrd, W. Va.
63. John Breaux, La.
64. Daniel Inouye, Hawaii
65. Jeff Bingaman, N.M.
66. Carl Levin, Mich.
67. Barbara Boxer, Calif.
68. Mary Landrieu, La.
69. Daniel Moynihan, N.Y.
70. Tom Harkin, Iowa
71. John Rockefeller IV, W. Va.
72. Max Baucus, Mont.
73. Robert Torricelli, N.J.
74. Ron Wyden, Ore.
75. Robert Kerrey, Neb.
76. Jack Reed, R.I.
77. Ernest Hollings, S.C.
78. Evan Bayh, Ind.
79. Richard Durbin, Ill.
80. Paul Sarbanes, Md.
81. Patty Murray, Wash.
82. Tim Johnson, S.D.
83. Patrick Leahy, Vt.
84. Charles Robb, Va.
85. Daniel Akaka, Hawaii
86. Barbara Mikulski, Md.
87. Richard Bryan, Nev.
88. Bob Graham, Fla.
89. Frank Lautenberg, N.J.
90. John Edwards, N.C.
91. John Kerry, Mass.
92. Byron Dorgan, N.D.
93. Russell Feingold, Wis.
94. Herb Kohl, Wis.
95. Dianne Feinstein, Calif.
96. Joseph Lieberman, Conn.
97. Joseph Biden, Jr., Del.
98. Edward Kennedy, Mass.
99. Max Cleland, Ga.
100. Blanche Lincoln, Ark.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

101. Chief Justice William Rehnquist





as a result of errors in care. And subsequent investigations around the country have confirmed the ubiquity of error. In one small study of how clinicians perform when patients have a sudden cardiac arrest, twenty-seven of thirty clinicians made an error in using the defibrillator; they may have charged it incorrectly or lost valuable time trying to figure out how to work a particular model. According to a 1995 study, mistakes in administering drugs—giving the wrong drug or the wrong dose, say—occur, on the average, about once for every hospital admission, mostly without ill effects, but one per cent of the time with serious consequences.

If error were due to a subset of dangerous doctors, you might expect malpractice cases to be concentrated among a small group, but in fact they follow a uniform, bell-shaped distribution. Most surgeons are sued at least once in the course of their careers. Studies of specific types of error, too, have found that repeat offenders are not the problem. The fact is that virtually everyone who cares for hospital patients will make serious mistakes, and even commit acts of negligence, every year. For this reason, doctors are seldom outraged when the press reports yet another medical horror story. They usually have a different reaction: *That could be me.* The important question isn't how to keep bad physicians from harming patients; it's how to keep good physicians from harming patients.

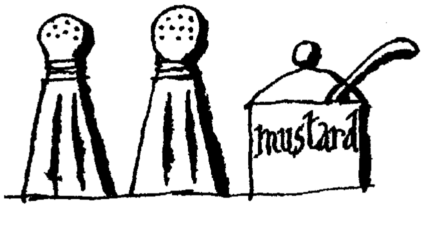
Medical-malpractice suits are a remarkably ineffective remedy. Troyen Brennan, a Harvard professor of law and public health, points out that research has consistently failed to find evidence that litigation reduces medical-error rates. In part, this may be because the weapon is so imprecise. Brennan led several studies following up on the patients in the Harvard Medical Practice Study. He found that fewer than two per cent of the patients who had received substandard care ever filed suit. Conversely, only a small minority among the patients who did sue had in fact been the victims of negligent care. And a patient's likelihood of winning a suit depended primarily on how poor his or her outcome was, regardless of whether that outcome was caused by disease or unavoidable risks of care.

The deeper problem with medical-malpractice suits, however, is that by demonizing errors they prevent doctors from acknowledging and discussing them publicly. The tort system makes adversaries of patient and physician, and pushes each to offer a heavily slanted version of events. When things go wrong, it's almost impossible for a physician to talk to a patient honestly about mistakes. Hospital lawyers warn doctors that, although they must, of course, tell patients about complications that occur, they are never to intimate that they were at fault, lest the "confession" wind up in court as damning evidence in a black-and-white morality tale. At most, a doctor might say, "I'm sorry that things didn't go as well as we had hoped."

There is one place, however, where doctors can talk candidly about their mistakes, if not with patients, then at least with one another. It is called the Morbidity and Mortality Conference—or, more simply, M. & M.—and it takes place, usually once a week, at nearly every academic hospital in the country. This institution survives because laws protecting its proceedings from legal discovery have stayed on the books in most states, despite frequent challenges. Surgeons, in particular, take the M. & M. seriously. Here they can gather behind closed doors to review the mistakes, complications, and deaths that occurred on their watch, determine responsibility, and figure out what to do differently next time.

III—SHOW AND TELL

At my hospital, we convene every Tuesday at five o'clock in a steep, plush amphitheatre lined with oil portraits of the great doctors whose achievements we're meant to live up to. All surgeons are expected to attend, from the interns to the chairman of surgery; we're also joined by medical students doing their surgery "rotation." An M. & M. can include almost a hundred people. We file in, pick up a photocopied list of cases to be discussed, and take our seats. The front row is occupied by the most senior surgeons: terse, serious men, now out of their scrubs and in dark suits, lined up like a panel of senators at a hearing. The chairman is a leonine presence in the seat closest to the plain wooden podium from which each case is presented. In the next few rows are the remaining surgical attendings; these tend to be younger, and several of them are women. The chief residents have put on long white coats and usually sit in the side rows. I join the mass of other residents, all of us in short white coats and green scrub pants, occupying the back rows.



For each case, the chief resident from the relevant service—cardiac, vascular, trauma, and so on—gathers the information, takes the podium, and tells the story. Here's a partial list of cases from a typical week (with a few changes to protect confidentiality): a sixty-eight-year-old man who bled to death after heart-valve surgery; a forty-seven-year-old woman who had to have a reoperation because of infection following an arterial bypass done in her left leg; a forty-four-year-old woman who had to have bile drained from her abdomen after gall-bladder surgery; three patients who had to have reoperations for bleeding following surgery; a sixty-three-year-old man who had a cardiac arrest following heart-bypass surgery; a sixty-six-year-old woman whose sutures suddenly gave way in an abdominal wound and nearly allowed her intestines to spill out. Ms. Williams's case, my failed tracheostomy, was just one case on a list like this. David Hernandez, the chief trauma resident, had subsequently reviewed the records and spoken to me and others involved. When the time came, it was he who stood up front and described what had happened.

Hernandez is a tall, rollicking, good old boy who can tell a yarn, but M.& M. presentations are bloodless and compact. He said something like: "This was a thirty-four-year-old female unrestrained driver in a high-speed rollover. The patient apparently had stable vitals at the scene but was unresponsive, and brought in by ambulance unintubated. She was G.C.S. 7 on arrival." G.C.S. stands for the Glasgow Coma Scale, which rates the severity of head injuries, from three to fifteen. G.C.S. 7 is in the comatose range. "Attempts to intubate were made without success in the E.R. and may have contributed to airway closure. A cricothyroidotomy was attempted without success."

These presentations can be awkward. The chief residents, not the attendings, determine which cases to report. That keeps the attendings honest—no one can cover up mistakes—but it puts the chief residents, who are, after all, underlings.

in a delicate position. The successful M. & M. presentation inevitably involves a certain elision of detail and a lot of passive verbs. No one screws up a cricothyroidotomy. Instead, "a cricothyroidotomy was attempted without success." The message, however, was not lost on anyone.

"For God's sake, Edwards. Put the laser pointer away."

Hernandez continued, "The patient arrested and required cardiac compressions. Anesthesia was then able to place a pediatric E.T. tube and the patient recovered stable vitals. The tracheostomy was then completed in the O.R."

So Louise Williams had been deprived of oxygen long enough to go into cardiac arrest, and everyone knew that meant she could easily have suffered a disabling stroke or been left a vegetable. Hernandez concluded with the fortunate aftermath: "Her workup was negative for permanent cerebral damage or other major injuries. The tracheostomy was removed on Day 2. She was discharged to home in good condition on Day 3." To the family's great relief, and mine, she had woken up in the morning a bit woozy but hungry, alert, and mentally intact. In a few weeks, the episode would heal to a scar.

But not before someone was called to account. A front-row voice immediately thundered, "What do you mean, 'A cricothyroidotomy was attempted without success?' " I sank into my seat, my face hot.

"This was my case," Dr. Ball volunteered from the front row. It is how every attending begins, and that little phrase contains a world of surgical culture. For all the talk in business schools and in corporate America about the virtues of "flat organizations," surgeons maintain an old-fashioned sense of hierarchy. When things go wrong, the attending is expected to take full responsibility. It makes no difference whether it was the resident's hand that slipped and lacerated an aorta; it doesn't matter whether the attending was at home in bed when a nurse gave a wrong dose of medication. At the M. & M., the burden of responsibility falls on the attending.

Ball went on to describe the emergency attending's failure to intubate Williams and his own failure to be at her bedside when things got out of control. He described the bad lighting and her extremely thick neck, and was careful to make those sound not like excuses but merely like complicating factors. Some attendings shook their heads in sympathy. A couple of them asked questions to clarify certain details. Throughout, Ball's tone was objective, detached. He had the air of a CNN newscaster describing unrest in Kuala Lumpur.

As always, the chairman, responsible for the over-all quality of our surgery service, asked the final question. What, he wanted to know, would Ball have done differently? Well, Ball replied, it didn't take long to get the stab-wound patient under control in the O.R., so he probably should have sent Hernandez up to the E.R. at that point or let Hernandez close the abdomen while he himself came up. People nodded. Lesson learned. Next case.

At no point during the M. & M. did anyone question why I had not called for help sooner or why I had not had the skill and knowledge that Williams needed. This is not to say that my actions were seen as acceptable. Rather, in the hierarchy, addressing my errors was Ball's role. The day after the disaster, Ball had caught me in the hall and taken me aside. His voice was more wounded than angry as he went through my specific failures. First, he explained, in an emergency tracheostomy it might have been better to do a vertical neck incision; that would have kept me out of the blood vessels, which run up and down—something I should have known at least from my reading. I might have had a much easier time getting her an airway then, he said. Second, and worse to him than mere ignorance, he didn't understand why I hadn't called him when there were clear signs of airway trouble developing. I offered no excuses. I promised to be better prepared for such cases and to be quicker to ask for help.

Even after Ball had gone down the fluorescent-lit hallway, I felt a sense of shame like a burning ulcer. This was not guilt: guilt is what you feel when you have done something wrong. What I felt was shame: *I* was what was wrong. And yet I also knew that a surgeon can take such feelings too far. It is one thing to be aware of one's limitations. It is another to be plagued by self-doubt. One surgeon with a national reputation told me about an abdominal operation in which he had lost control of bleeding while he was removing what turned out to be a benign tumor and the patient had died. "It was a clean kill," he said. Afterward, he could barely bring himself to operate. When he did operate, he became tentative and indecisive. The case affected his performance for months.

Even worse than losing self-confidence, though, is reacting defensively. There are surgeons who will see faults everywhere except in themselves. They have no questions and no fears about their abilities. As a result, they learn nothing from their mistakes and know nothing of their limitations. As one surgeon told me, it is a rare but alarming thing to meet a surgeon without fear. "If you're not a little afraid when you operate," he said, "you're bound to do a patient a grave disservice."

The atmosphere at the M. & M. is meant to discourage both attitudes—self-doubt and denial—for the M. & M. is a cultural ritual that inculcates in surgeons a "correct" view of mistakes. "What would you do differently?" a chairman asks concerning cases of avoidable complications. "Nothing" is seldom an acceptable answer.

In its way, the M. & M. is an impressively sophisticated and human institution. Unlike the courts or the media, it recognizes that human error is generally not something that can be deterred by punishment. The M. & M. sees avoiding error as largely a matter of will—of staying sufficiently informed and alert to anticipate the myriad ways that things can go wrong and then trying to head off each potential problem before it happens. Why do things go wrong? Because, doctors say, making them go right is hard stuff. It isn't damnable that an error occurs, but there is some shame to it. In fact, the M. & M.'s ethos can seem paradoxical. On the one hand, it reinforces the very American idea that error is intolerable. On the other hand, the very existence of the M. & M., its place on the weekly schedule, amounts to an acknowledgment that mistakes are an inevitable part of medicine.

BUT why do they happen so often? Lucian Leape, medicine's leading expert on error, points out that many other industries—whether the task is manufacturing semiconductors or serving customers at the Ritz-Carlton—simply wouldn't countenance error rates like those in hospitals. The aviation industry has reduced the frequency of operational errors to one in a hundred thousand flights, and most of those errors have no harmful consequences. The buzzword at General Electric these days is "Six Sigma," meaning that its goal is to make product defects so rare that in statistical terms they are more than six standard deviations away from being a matter of chance—almost a one-in-a-million occurrence.

Of course, patients are far more complicated and idiosyncratic than airplanes, and medicine isn't a matter of delivering a fixed product or even a catalogue of products; it may well be more complex than just about any other field of human endeavor. Yet everything we've learned in the past two decades—from cognitive psychology, from "human factors" engineering, from studies of disasters like Three Mile Island and Bhopal—has yielded the same insights: not only do all human beings err but they err frequently and in predictable, patterned ways. And systems that do not adjust for these realities can end up exacerbating rather than eliminating error.

The British psychologist James Reason argues, in his book "Human Error," that our propensity for certain types of error is the price we pay for the brain's remarkable ability to think and act intuitively—to sift quickly through the sensory information that constantly bombards us without wasting time trying to work through every situation anew. Thus systems that rely on human perfection present what Reason calls "latent errors"—errors waiting to happen. Medicine teems with examples. Take writing out a prescription, a rote procedure that relies on memory and attention, which we know are unreliable. Inevitably, a physician will sometimes specify the wrong dose or the wrong drug. Even when the prescription is written correctly, there's a risk that it will be misread. (Computerized ordering systems can almost eliminate errors of this kind, but only a small minority of hospitals have adopted them.) Medical equipment, which manufacturers often build without human operators in mind, is an-

DESPERADOS

We were desperate. No, we were beyond desperation.
We were beside ourselves. At wit's end.
We said we could slip outside, that was it.
Get in the car and just keep on driving. Never look back.
No second thoughts. No chance of posing as salt.

But they'd find us, you said. *They'd bring us back*
and it would begin again. We could start a new life.
We could begin again, trying the something new.
The road ahead again untrod, winding beyond the next curve
with speed and assurance. Did I say we were desperate?

The lightning took over and revealed the night.
The landscape looked altered—rocks and trees
no longer where they had been hours before.
We hadn't made a move, but we were desperate.
Desperate still—oh, desperate beyond description.

But they'd find us, you said. *They'd bring us back.*
We said we could slip outside, that was it.
Never look back. No second thoughts.
We were desperate. At wit's end. Beside ourselves.
The landscape looked altered, beyond description.

We could begin again. Something new.
The landscape looked altered. Never look back.
Did I say desperate to try something new?
A new life? The road ahead untrod, winding beyond.
We hadn't made a move—just kept on driving.

—DANIEL HALPERN

other area rife with latent errors: one reason physicians are bound to have problems when they use cardiac defibrillators is that the devices have no standard design. You can also make the case that onerous workloads, chaotic environments, and inadequate team communication all represent latent errors in the system.

James Reason makes another important observation: disasters do not simply occur; they evolve. In complex systems, a single failure rarely leads to harm. Human beings are impressively good at adjusting when an error becomes apparent, and systems often have built-in defenses. For example, pharmacists and nurses routinely check and counter-check physicians' orders. But errors do not always become apparent, and backup systems themselves often fail as a result of latent errors. A pharmacist forgets to check one of a thousand prescriptions. A machine's alarm bell malfunctions. The one attending trauma surgeon available gets stuck in the operating room. When things go wrong, it is usually because a series of failures conspire to produce disaster.

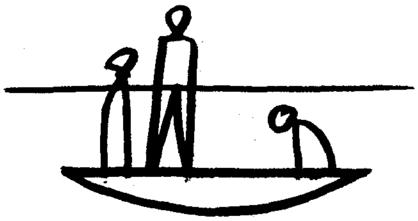
The M. & M. takes none of this into account. For that reason, many experts see it as a rather shabby approach to analyzing error and improving performance in medicine. It isn't enough to ask what a clinician could or should have done differently so that he and others may learn for next time. The doctor is often only the final actor in a chain of events that set him or her up to fail. Error experts, therefore, believe that it's the process, not the individuals in it, which requires closer examination and correction. In a sense, they want to industrialize medicine. And they can already claim one success story: the specialty of anesthesiology, which has adopted their precepts and seen extraordinary results.

IV—NEARLY PERFECT

At the center of the emblem of the American Society of Anesthesiologists is a single word: "Vigilance." When you put a patient to sleep under general anesthesia, you assume almost complete control of the patient's body. The body is paralyzed, the brain rendered unconscious, and machines are hooked up to control breathing, heart rate, blood pressure—all the vital functions. Given the complexity of the machinery and of the human body, there are a seemingly infinite number of ways in which things can go wrong, even in minor surgery. And yet anesthesiologists have found that if problems are detected they can usually be solved. In the nineteen-forties, there was only one death resulting from anesthesia in every twenty-five hundred operations, and between the nineteen-sixties and the nineteen-eighties the rate had stabilized at one or two in every ten thousand operations.

But Ellison (Jeep) Pierce had always regarded even that rate as unconscionable. From the time he began practicing, in 1960, as a young anesthesiologist out of North Carolina and the University of Pennsylvania, he had maintained a case file of details from all the deadly anesthetic accidents he had come across or participated in. But it was one case in particular that galvanized him. Friends of his had taken their eighteen-year-old daughter to the hospital to have her wisdom teeth pulled, under general anesthesia. The anesthesiologist inserted the breathing tube into her esophagus instead of her trachea, which is a relatively common mishap, and then failed to spot the error, which is not. Deprived of oxygen, she died within minutes. Pierce knew that a one-in-ten-thousand death rate, given that anesthesia was administered in the United States an estimated thirty-five million times each year, meant thirty-five hundred avoidable deaths like that one.

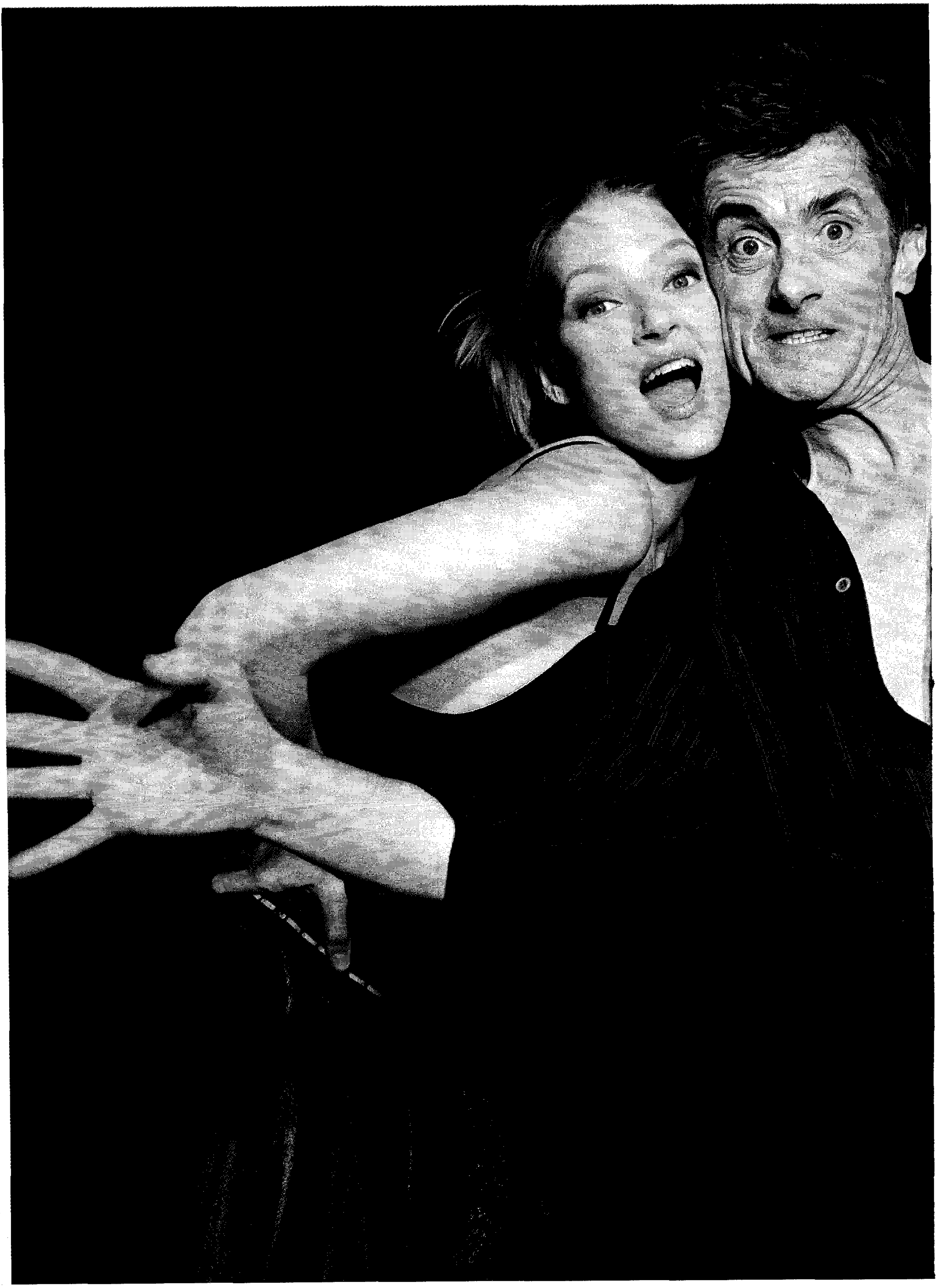
In 1982, Pierce was elected vice-president of the American Society of Anesthesiologists and got an opportunity to do something about the death rate. The same year, ABC's "20/20" aired an exposé that caused a considerable stir in his profession. The segment began, "If you are going to go into anesthesia, you are going on a long trip, and you should not do it if you can avoid it in any way. General anesthesia [is] safe most of the time, but there are dangers from human error, carelessness, and a critical shortage of anesthesiologists. This year, six thousand patients will die or suffer brain damage." The program presented several terrifying cases from around the country. Between the small crisis that the show created and the sharp increases in physicians' malpractice-insurance premiums at that time, Pierce was able to mobilize the Society of Anesthesiologists around the problem of error.



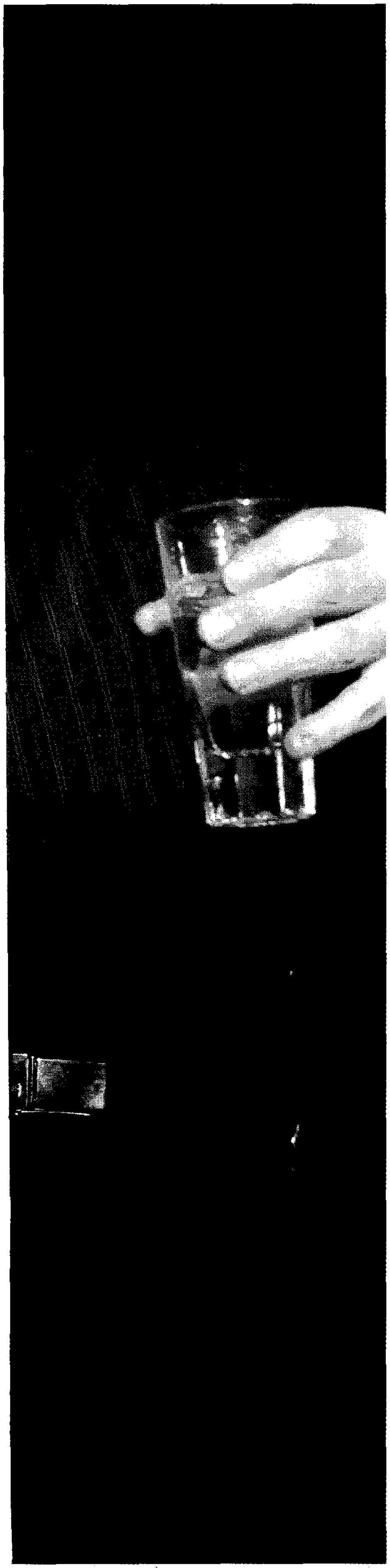
He turned for ideas not to a physician but to an engineer named Jeffrey Cooper, the lead author of a groundbreaking 1978 paper entitled "Preventable Anesthesia Mishaps: A Study of Human Factors." An unassuming, fastidious man, Cooper had been hired in 1972, when he was twenty-six years old, by the Massachusetts General Hospital bioengineering unit, to work on developing machines for anesthesiology researchers. He gravitated toward the operating room, however, and spent hours there observing the anesthesiologists, and one of the first things he noticed was how poorly the anesthesia machines were designed. For example, a clockwise turn of a dial decreased the concentration of potent anesthetics in about half the machines but increased the concentration in the other half. He decided to borrow a technique called "critical incident analysis"—which had been used since the nineteen-fifties to analyze mishaps in aviation—in an effort to learn how equipment might be contributing to errors in anesthesia. The technique is built around carefully conducted interviews, designed to capture as much detail as possible about dangerous incidents: how specific accidents evolved and what factors contributed to them. This information is then used to look for patterns among different cases.

Getting open, honest reporting is crucial. The Federal Aviation Administration has a formalized system for analyzing and reporting dangerous aviation incidents, and its enormous success in improving airline safety rests on two cornerstones. Pilots who report an incident within ten days have automatic immunity from punishment, and the reports go to a neutral, outside agency, NASA, which has no interest in using the information against individual pilots. For Jeffrey Cooper, it was probably an advantage that he was an engineer, and not a physician, so that anesthesiologists regarded him as a discreet, unthreatening interviewer.

The result was the first in-depth, scientific look at errors in medicine. His



OFF BROADWAY *Uma Thurman portrays an American movie star in London and Roger Rees a skeptical playwright, in an update of Mol*



e Misanthrope." Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.

detailed analysis of three hundred and fifty-nine errors provided a view of the profession unlike anything that had been seen before. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that the start of anesthesia ("takeoff") was the most dangerous part, anesthesiologists learned that incidents tended to occur in the middle of anesthesia, when vigilance waned. The most common kind of incident involved errors in maintaining the patient's breathing, and these were usually the result of an undetected disconnection or misconnection of the breathing tubing, mistakes in managing the airway, or mistakes in using the anesthesia machine. Just as important, Cooper enumerated a list of contributory factors, including inadequate experience, inadequate familiarity with equipment, poor communication among team members, haste, inattention, and fatigue.

The study provoked widespread debate among anesthesiologists, but there was no concerted effort to solve the problems until Jeep Pierce came along. Through the anesthesiology society at first, and then through a foundation that he started, Pierce directed funding into research on how to reduce the problems Cooper had identified, sponsored an international conference to gather ideas from around the world, and brought anesthesia-machine designers into safety discussions.

It all worked. Hours for anesthesiology residents were shortened. Manufacturers began redesigning their machines with fallible human beings in mind. Dials were standardized to turn in a uniform direction; locks were put in to prevent accidental administration of more than one anesthetic gas; controls were changed so that oxygen delivery could not be turned down to zero.

Where errors could not be eliminated directly, anesthesiologists began looking for reliable means of detecting them earlier. For example, because the trachea and the esophagus are so close together, it is almost inevitable that an anesthesiologist will sometimes put the breathing tube down the wrong pipe. Anesthesiologists had always checked for this by listening with a stethoscope for breath sounds over both lungs. But Cooper had turned up a surprising number of mishaps—like the one that befell the daughter of Pierce's friends—involving undetected esophageal intubations. Something more effective was needed. In fact, monitors that could detect this kind of error had been available for years, but, in part because of their expense, relatively few anesthesiologists used them. One type of monitor could verify that the tube was in the trachea by detecting carbon dioxide being exhaled from the lungs. Another type, the pulse oximeter, tracked blood-oxygen levels, thereby providing an early warning that something was wrong with the patient's breathing system. Prodded by Pierce and others, the anesthesiology society made the use of both types of monitor for every patient receiving general anesthesia an official standard. Today, anesthesia deaths from misconnecting the breathing system or intubating the esophagus rather than the trachea are virtually unknown. In a decade, the over-all death rate dropped to just one in more than two hundred thousand cases—less than a twentieth of what it had been.

And the reformers have not stopped there. David Gaba, a professor of anesthesiology at Stanford, has focussed on improving human performance. In aviation, he points out, pilot experience is recognized to be invaluable but insufficient: pilots seldom have direct experience with serious plane malfunction anymore. They are therefore required to undergo yearly training in crisis simulators. Why not doctors, too?

Gaba, a physician with training in engineering, led in the design of an anesthesia-simulation system known as the Eagle Patient Simulator. It is a life-size, computer-driven mannequin that is capable of amazingly realistic behavior. It has a circulation, a heartbeat, and lungs that take in oxygen and expire carbon dioxide. If you inject drugs into it or administer inhaled anesthetics, it will detect the type and amount, and its heart rate, its blood pressure, and its oxygen levels will respond appropriately. The "patient" can be made to develop airway swelling, bleeding, and heart disturbances. The mannequin is laid on an operating table in a simulation room equipped exactly like the real thing. Here both residents and experienced attending physicians learn to perform effectively in all kinds of dangerous, and sometimes freak, scenarios: an anesthesia-machine malfunction, a power outage, a patient who goes into cardiac arrest during surgery, and even a cesarean-section patient whose airway shuts down and who requires an emergency tracheostomy.

Though anesthesiology has unquestionably taken the lead in analyzing and trying to remedy "systems" failures, there are signs of change in other quarters. The American Medical Association, for example, set up its National Patient Safety Foundation in 1997 and asked Cooper and Pierce to serve on the board of directors. The foundation is funding research, sponsoring conferences, and attempting to develop new standards for hospital drug-ordering systems that could substantially reduce medication mistakes—the single most common type of medical error.

Even in surgery there have been some encouraging developments. For instance, operating on the wrong knee or foot or other body part of a patient has been a recurrent, if rare, mistake. A typical response has been to fire the surgeon. Recently, however, hospitals and surgeons have begun to recognize that the body's bilateral symmetry makes these errors predictable. Last year, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons endorsed a simple way of preventing them: make it standard practice for surgeons to initial, with a marker, the body part to be cut before the patient comes to surgery.

The Northern New England Cardiovascular Disease Study Group, based at Dartmouth, is another success story. Though the group doesn't conduct the sort of in-depth investigation of mishaps that Jeffrey Cooper pioneered, it has shown what can be done simply through statistical monitoring. Six hospitals belong to this consortium, which tracks deaths and complications (such as wound infections, uncontrolled bleeding, and stroke) arising from heart surgery and tries to identify various risk factors. Its researchers found, for example, that there were relatively high death rates among patients who developed anemia after bypass surgery, and that anemia developed most often in small patients. The fluid used to "prime" the heart-lung machine caused the anemia, because it diluted a patient's blood, so the smaller the patient (and his or her blood supply) the greater the effect. Members of the consortium now have several promising solutions to the problem. Another study found that a group at one hospital had made mistakes in "handoffs"—say, in passing preoperative lab results to the people in the operating room. The study group solved the problem by developing a pilot's checklist for all patients coming to the O.R. These efforts have introduced a greater degree of standardization, and so reduced the death rate in those six hospitals from four per cent to three per cent between 1991 and 1996. That meant two hundred and ninety-three fewer deaths. But the Northern New England cardiac group, even with its narrow focus and techniques, remains an exception; hard information about how things go wrong is still scarce. There is a hodgepodge of evidence that latent errors and systemic factors may contribute to surgical errors: the lack of standardized protocols, the surgeon's inexperience, the hospital's inexperience, inadequately designed technology and techniques, thin staffing, poor teamwork, time of day, the effects of managed care and corporate medicine, and so on and so on. But which are the major risk factors? We still don't know. Surgery, like most of medicine, awaits its Jeff Cooper.

V—GETTING IT RIGHT

It was a routine gallbladder operation, on a routine day: on the operating table was a mother in her forties, her body covered by blue paper drapes except for her round, antiseptic-coated belly. The gallbladder is a floppy, finger-length sac of bile like a deflated olive-green balloon tucked under the liver, and when gallstones form, as this patient had learned, they can cause excruciating bouts of pain. Once we removed her gallbladder, the pain would stop.

There are risks to this surgery, but they used to be much greater. Just a decade ago, surgeons had to make a six-inch abdominal incision that left patients in the hospital for the better part of a week just recovering from the wound. Today, we've learned to take out gallbladders with a minute camera and instruments that we manipulate through tiny incisions. The operation, often done as day surgery, is known as laparoscopic cholecystectomy, or "lap chole." Half a million Americans a year now have their gallbladders removed this way; at my hospital alone, we do several hundred lap choles annually.

When the attending gave me the go-ahead, I cut a discreet inch-long semicircle in the wink of skin just above the belly button. I dissected through fat and fascia until I was inside the abdomen, and dropped into place a "port," a half-inch-wide sheath for slipping instruments in and out. We hooked gas tubing up to a side vent on the port, and carbon dioxide poured in, inflating the abdomen until it was distended like a tire. I inserted the miniature camera. On a video monitor a few feet away, the woman's intestines blinked into view. With the abdomen inflated, I had room to move the camera, and I swung it around to look at the liver. The gallbladder could be seen poking out from under the edge.

We put in three more ports through even tinier incisions, spaced apart to complete the four corners of a square. Through the ports on his side, the attending put in two long "graspers," like small-scale versions of the device that a department-store clerk might use to get a hat off the top shelf. Watching the screen as he maneuvered them, he reached under the edge of the liver, clamped onto the gallbladder, and pulled it up into view. We were set to proceed.

Removing the gallbladder is fairly straightforward. You sever it from its stalk and from its blood supply, and pull the rubbery sac out of the abdomen through the incision near the belly button. You let the carbon dioxide out of the belly, pull out the ports, put a few stitches in the tiny incisions, slap some Band-Aids on top, and you're done. There's one looming danger, though: the stalk of the gallbladder is a branch off the liver's only conduit for sending bile to the intestines for the digestion of fats. And if you accidentally injure this main bile duct, the bile backs up and starts to destroy the liver. Between ten and twenty per cent of the patients to whom this happens will die. Those who survive often have permanent liver damage and can go on to require liver transplantation. According to a standard textbook, "injuries to the main bile duct are nearly always the result of misadventure during operation and are therefore a serious reproach to the surgical profession." It is a true surgical error, and, like any surgical team doing a lap chole, we were intent on avoiding this mistake.

Using a dissecting instrument, I carefully stripped off the fibrous white tissue and yellow fat overlying and concealing the base of the gallbladder. Now we could see its broad neck and the short stretch where it narrowed down to a duct—a tube no thicker than a strand of spaghetti peeking out from the surrounding tissue, but magnified on the screen to the size of major plumbing. Then, just to be absolutely sure we were looking at the gallbladder duct and not the main bile duct, I stripped away some more of the surrounding tissue. The attending and I stopped at this point, as we always do, and discussed the anatomy. The neck of the gallbladder led straight into the tube we were eying. So it had to be the right duct. We had exposed a good length of it without a sign of the main bile duct. Everything looked perfect, we agreed. "Go for it," the attending said.

I slipped in the clip applier, an instrument that squeezes V-shaped metal clips onto whatever you put in its jaws. I got the jaws around the duct and was about to fire when my eye caught, on the screen, a little globule of fat lying on top of the duct. That wasn't necessarily anything unusual, but somehow it didn't look right. With the tip of the clip applier, I tried to flick it aside, but, instead of a little globule, a whole layer of thin unseen tissue came up, and, underneath, we saw that the duct had a fork in it. My stomach dropped. If not for that little extra fastidiousness, I would have clipped off the main bile duct.

Here was the paradox of error in medicine. With meticulous technique and assiduous effort to insure that they have correctly identified the anatomy, surgeons need never cut the main bile duct. It is a paradigm of an avoidable error. At the same time, studies show that even highly experienced surgeons inflict this terrible injury about once in every two hundred lap choles. To put it another way, I may have averted disaster this time, but a statistician would say that, no matter how hard I tried, I was almost certain to make this error at least once in the course of my career.

But the story doesn't have to end here, as the cognitive psychologists and industrial-error experts have demonstrated. Given the results they've achieved in anesthesiology, it's clear that we can make dramatic improvements by going after the process, not the people. But there are distinct limitations to the industrial cure, however necessary its emphasis on systems and structures. It would be deadly for us, the individual actors, to give up our belief in human perfectibility. The statistics may say that someday I will sever someone's main bile duct, but each time I go into a gallbladder operation I believe that with enough will and effort I can beat the odds. This isn't just professional vanity. It's a necessary part of good medicine, even in superbly "optimized" systems. Operations like that lap chole have taught me how easily error can occur, but they've also showed me something else: effort does matter; diligence and attention to the minutest details can save you.

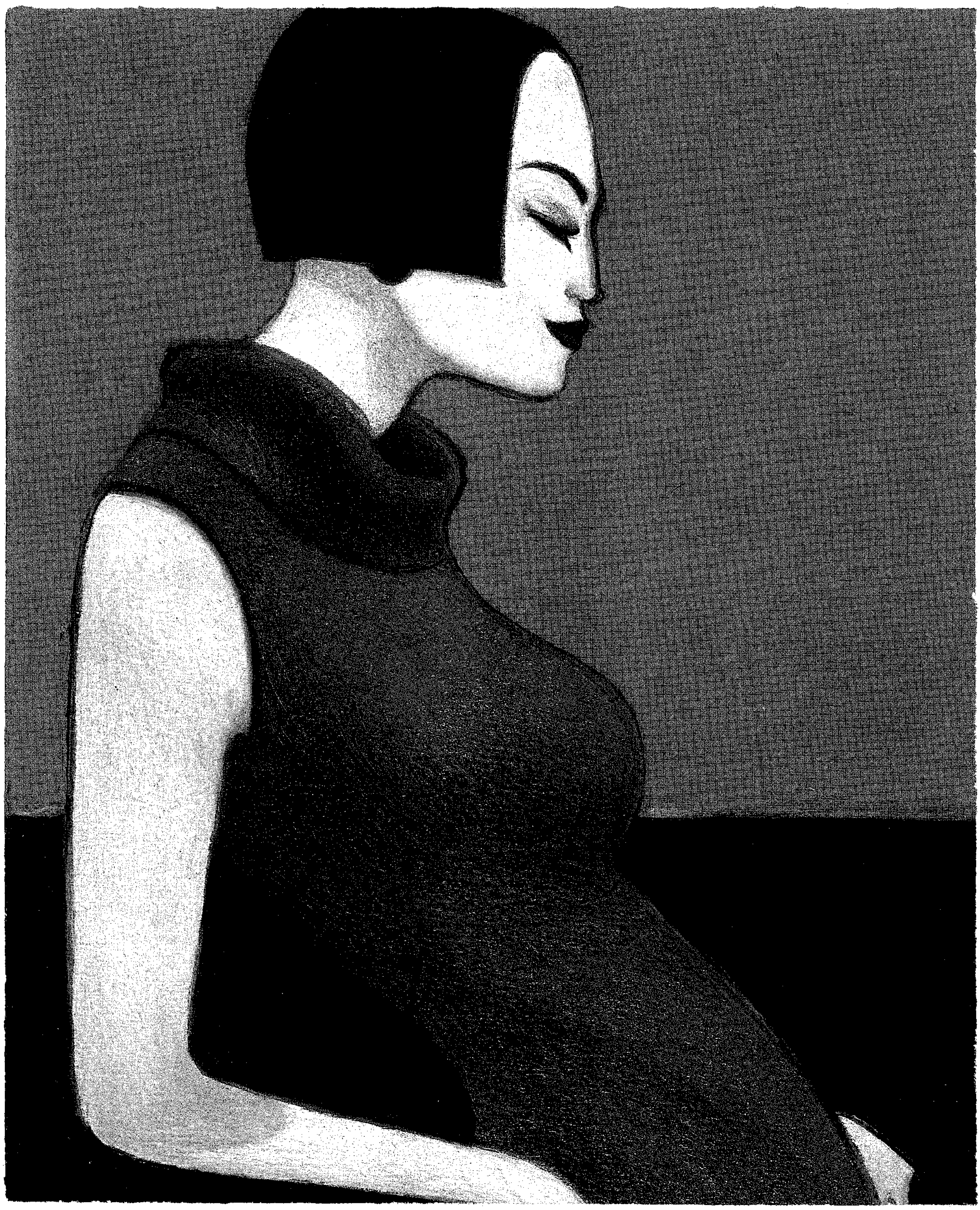
This may explain why many doctors take exception to talk of "systems problems," "continuous quality improvement," and "process reëngineering." It is the dry language of structures, not people. I'm no exception: something in me, too, demands an acknowledgment of my autonomy, which is also to say my ultimate culpability. Go back to that Friday night in the E.R., to the moment when I stood, knife in hand, over Louise Williams, her lips blue, her throat a swollen, bloody, and suddenly closed passage. A systems engineer might have proposed some useful changes. Perhaps a backup suction device should always be at hand, and better light more easily available. Perhaps the institution could have trained me better for such crises, could have required me to have operated on a few more goats. Perhaps emergency tracheostomies are so difficult under any circumstances that an automated device could have been designed to do a better job. But the could-haves are infinite, aren't they? Maybe Williams could have worn her seat belt, or had one less beer that night. We could call any or all of these factors latent errors, accidents waiting to happen.

But although they put the odds against me, it wasn't as if I had no chance of succeeding. Good doctoring is all about making the most of the hand you're dealt, and I failed to do so. The indisputable fact was that I hadn't called for help when I could have, and when I plunged the knife into her neck and made my horizontal slash my best was not good enough. It was just luck, hers and mine, that Dr. O'Connor somehow got a breathing tube into her in time.

There are all sorts of reasons that it would be wrong to take my license away or to take me to court. These reasons do not absolve me. Whatever the limits of the M. & M., its fierce ethic of personal responsibility for errors is a formidable virtue. No matter what measures are taken, medicine will sometimes falter, and it isn't reasonable to ask that it achieve perfection. What's reasonable is to ask that medicine never cease to aim for it. ◆

Bernard Schoenbaum

"You tell them we're not ready to make nice until they're ready to make nice."

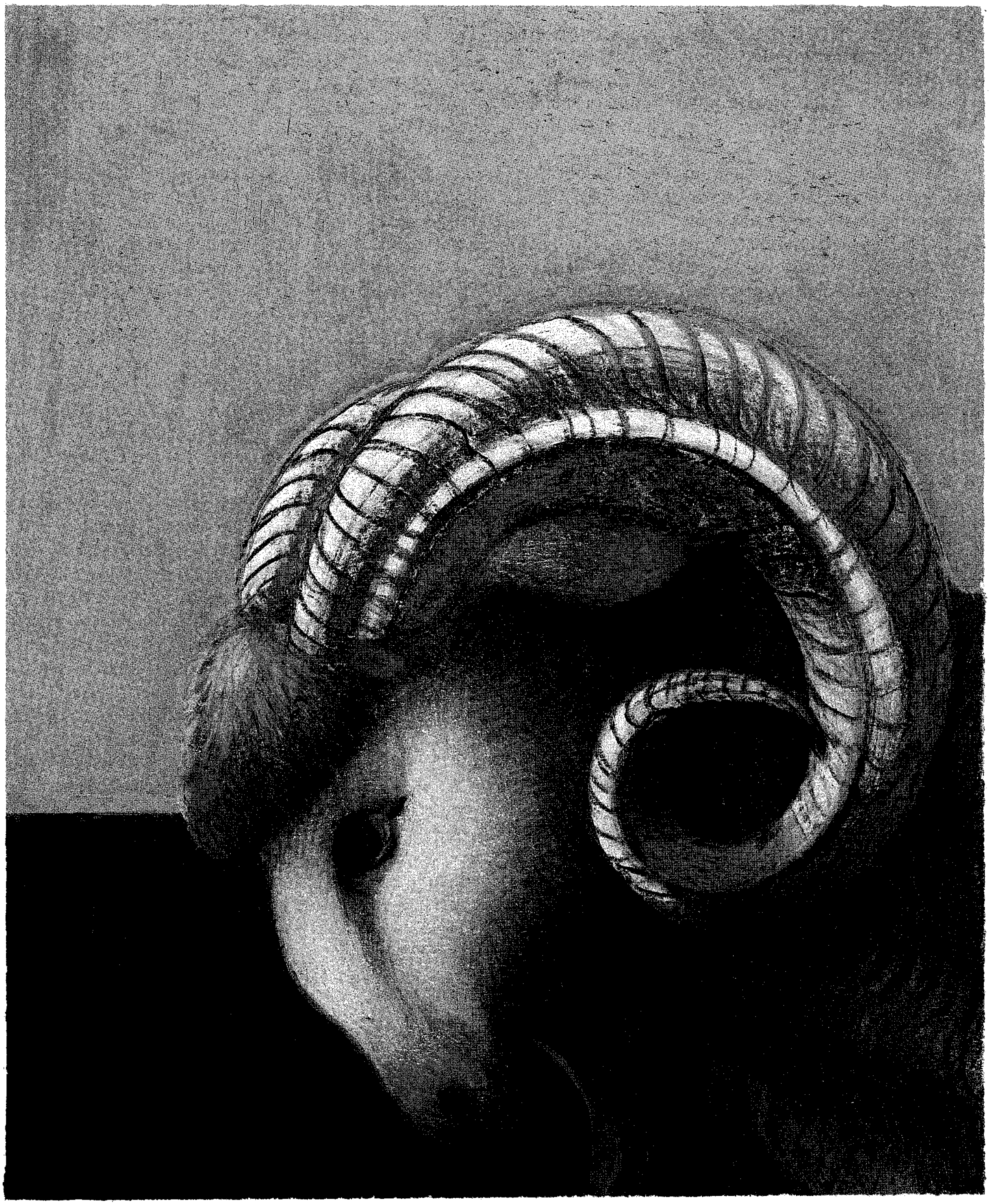


LETTER FROM MONGOLIA

THE CRISIS IN CASHMERE

How a very soft wool reflects a revolution in the global economy.

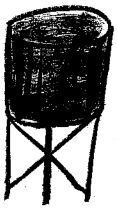
BY REBECCA MEAD



LORENZO MATTOTTI

If you had taken a walk through SoHo around Christmastime in search of a cashmere sweater, your options would have been many. At Club Monaco, the mid-priced Canadian chain, you would have found a short-sleeved cashmere sweater in black for eighty-nine dollars. If you had dropped into the Marc Jacobs store, on Mercer Street, you would have found vibrant aquamarine waffle-weave cashmere thermals, looking like Midas's pajamas and selling for just shy of nine hundred dollars. Dipping south at Broadway, you could have checked out Banana Republic, where you'd have found a chunky ribbed pullover for two hundred and fifty dollars. You could have finished your search on Elizabeth Street, at the Lucien Pellat-Finet boutique, a specialty cashmere store favored by models and *Vogue* editors and even some wealthy customers who pay retail, where you could have bought a jewel-colored sweater for sixteen hundred dollars, only slightly less expensive than the jewels it imitated.

SoHo may offer an uncommon variety of cashmere, but a trip to any mall in America would yield similar findings. This winter, cashmere—a word that formerly brought to mind dull sweaters bought duty-free at Heathrow Airport and pastel twinsets incomplete without pearls—is widely available, and newly fashionable. About four and a half million cashmere sweaters were imported into the United States in 1998, up from a little more than two and a half million in 1997. Donna Karan has a fragrance called Cashmere Mist. Ellen DeGeneres made a cashmere joke while serving as hostess of the VH1 Fashion Awards, in November. Even the Gap started selling tiny cashmere cardigans, for newborns.



Cashmere was a luxury item at the time of the Roman Empire, and it has been periodically in vogue ever since: Beau Brummel popularized white cashmere waistcoats for men early in the nineteenth century, and Napoleon started a fad for cashmere shawls when he gave his second wife seventeen of them. If you ask members of the fashion community to explain the current popularity of cashmere, you'll be told that the fabric's understated luxury is well suited to a cultural moment in which unshowy self-indulgence is the highest ideal—a moment when a perfectly tailored but unobtrusive Jil Sander suit is better than a gold-buttoned Chanel two-piece. "There's a reverse snobbery," says Marc Jacobs, who is currently experimenting with water-resistant cashmere and cashmere bonded with cotton for the line he designs for Louis Vuitton. "The real reason you wear it is for the comfort and the warmth, and not necessarily to have it seen. It is like cashmere-lined gloves: it's the way it feels, rather than the way it looks."

But the ubiquity of cashmere this season is more complicated than that. It is a consequence of much larger political and economic issues that have nothing to do with fashion. There are cashmere sweaters in all of America's store windows today not just because of designers' whims but because halfway around the world, in Asia, the price of raw cashmere has dropped lower than ever. The creation of freer markets in China and Mongolia, which are the source of most of the world's cashmere, has encouraged a dramatic increase in production—in fact, to the point of oversupply. At the same time, the collapse of the Japanese economy has caused a fall in cashmere sales there, creating a worldwide glut. And although the plenitude of affordable cashmere has made it a favorite of designers and consumers, the cashmere industry is actually in crisis, with stockpiles of the raw fibre sitting unused in Chinese warehouses, and with cashmere companies worrying about how to afford to keep their machinery running. The array of cashmere sweaters in SoHo, it turns out, is a knotty lesson in late-twentieth-century capitalism waiting to be unravelled.

MUNKHZORIG is a twenty-five-year-old herder of cashmere goats who lives with his wife and their two small daughters in a region of Mongolia called Zaamar, a four-hour drive from the capital city, Ulaanbaatar—a drive that begins on a paved road, which becomes a dirt road, which becomes no road at all across empty snow-dusted scrub.

I visited Zaamar in early December, when temperatures in the Mongolian countryside drop as low as thirty degrees below zero at night and rise only to fifteen below during the day. At this time of year, Munkhzorig's goats, a hundred in all, spend their days grazing the sparse land and growing a fine, downy undercoat as a defense against the bitter cold. In April, before the animals have a chance to shed, Munkhzorig will corral them and comb out their cashmere (which, contrary to a popular misconception, grows all over their bodies, not just on the underbelly). "Combing" is too gentle a word for the actual process, unless you imagine combing the tangled hair of a screaming five-year-old who has just discovered chewing gum: the goats are wrestled down, and the cashmere is tugged off them with a large, wide-toothed metal comb that looks like something left over from the Iron Age. The comb becomes ensnarled with "greasy cashmere": a mixture of long hairs, dirt, bits of vegetation, and a small amount of fine down—three to four ounces of down per goat per year, or enough for a third of a sweater.

Along with an interpreter, a guide, and a representative from a cashmere company, I joined Munkhzorig and his family in their felt-lined yurt—or *ger*, as such nomadic tents are called in Mongolia. In it I felt as if I might be in a Gypsy caravan, if such a caravan could be perfectly circular. The *ger's* walls were hung with rugs, and there were two or three brightly painted chests, in which the family's clothes and valuables were stored. By one chest stood an ornate silver-and-leather saddle—a family heirloom, Munkhzorig explained, which is used at Naadam, the national summer festival. A thick fug of heat was provided by a central stove, on which an elaborate Mongolian lunch was being prepared: buttery, salty milk tea to be drunk alongside jaw-breaking lumps of goat cheese and creamy crusts of goat-milk curds; boiled dumplings filled with meat and flavored with onions; and boiled beef chops, which were passed around in a large communal bowl with a single sharp knife to slice the flesh—and the highly prized fat—from the bone.

Munkhzorig, who, like most Mongolians, uses only one name, sat on a rug on the floor, reclining against one of three narrow beds that were set against the curved walls of the *ger;* he kept refilling a single cup, shared by all of us, either with vodka or with Mongolian homebrew—a fizzy, colorless liquid made from cheese curd. He wore a fur hat, a padded blue *del*, or traditional Mongolian wrap coat, which was lined with embroidered satin and edged with gold trim, belted low on his waist. He also wore a pair of heavy-duty sweatpants, which had the letters "USA" printed down one leg.

Over lunch, he told me that last spring he had received a good price for the ten kilograms of cashmere his goats produced: around thirteen thousand Mongolian tugriks, or sixteen dollars, per kilo. Like almost every herder, Munkhzorig has a battery-operated radio in his *ger*, on which cashmere prices are regularly broadcast. The market price was now down to seven and a half thousand tugriks for ten kilograms, and I asked Munkhzorig how that would affect him. "I'll comb the goats, but I might store the cashmere for a year if the price doesn't go up," he said, and he explained that he could keep his cashmere crop in the wooden shack next to his *ger*—an open-air refrigerator in which his meat and milk are stored. "If the price is below seven thousand, I'm not interested," he said.

Munkhzorig's dwindling income is the result of a worldwide drop in the price of cashmere. This has been caused by two factors, a decline in demand globally and an increase in aggregate production among the four cashmere-producing countries: China, which accounts for sixty per cent of the international cashmere crop; Mongolia, the next-biggest producer; and Iran and Afghanistan, each of which supplies much smaller amounts. (So-called Scottish or Italian cashmere is merely spun and knitted or woven in those two countries.)

For most of this century, Mongolia—a vast, underdeveloped country with fewer than two and a half million people, nearly half of whom are nomadic herders—was part of the Soviet-bloc economy. Its role in that continent-wide shell game was to supply cashmere for sweaters to be sold in Eastern Europe and meat to feed the Soviet Army. Since 1990, when a nonviolent democratic movement forced the Communist government to resign, Mongolia has undergone a dramatic shift to a market economy, and foremost among the reforms has been the breakup of the collectivized farms that had been established in the nineteen-fifties, under Stalin. The current social-democratic government was elected in 1996 after offering voters a "Contract with Mongolia," which was directly inspired by Newt Gingrich. The platform promised even more aggressive deregulation of the remaining state-owned industries, including Gobi, which was for a long time the only cashmere company in Mongolia; since 1990, eighteen rival cashmere startups have come into being.

Munkhzorig became a herder after graduating from community college in 1992; since then, the number of goats in Mongolia has more than doubled, from five and a half million to eleven million, as the direct result of a nationwide post-Soviet political overhaul. The reforms throughout the nineties mean that Munkhzorig, who had been raised in a herder family before going away to school at the age of eight, is able to do what his parents never could: own his herd. "It's totally different now. Everything is different," he told me, stroking his chin as he pondered the country's enormous change. "My parents had a paid job, and gave their cashmere to the local agent, and there was a more sophisticated kind of system."

"System," however, is not the right word to describe the tangled, ad-hoc business that the production of cashmere has become in post-Communist Mongolia. A new breed of trader has sprung up, offering cash or bartered staples such as rice and flour in exchange for raw cashmere. The herders, who formerly received a fixed salary from the state, can now shop their cashmere around, looking for the best price paid by travelling buyers from the city or from China, or they can make the trip to Ulaanbaatar and sell their wares directly, eliminating the middleman. Last year, Munkhzorig rode the twice-weekly bus into Ulaanbaatar with his ten-kilo sack of cashmere, and he expects to do the same this year. "I'm interested in the cash," he said. "The traders, when they barter, double or triple the price of the goods."

Having been liberated from state quotas on the number of goats they can own, the herders are free to expand the size of their herds as their profitability allows, and a new class of wealthy herders has emerged, people who are rich enough to afford their own vehicles and electrical generators, and even to put satellite television dishes on their *gers*. Less successful herders also have an incentive to acquire more animals—not only goats but sheep, cattle, yaks, camels, and horses as well. For one thing, livestock is insurance against im-

"That's nothing. My mom is older than the Superbowl."

COSMETIC SURGERY
M. Twohy

"Would you like to take your old face?"

• •

poverishment, since the land on which the animals graze is commonly held, and in bad times they can always be eaten. "It can be very profitable, raising animals," Munkhzorig told me when he asked if I wanted to see the pride of his herd: two bucks that had won prizes for the fineness of their cashmere and which he was using for breeding. He mounted his horse and sped off across the scrub for half a mile or so; my party followed in our four-wheel drive. When we caught up with him, he was grappling with two russet-colored goats that were the size of large golden retrievers and had enormous, prehistoric-looking horns. Munkhzorig parted the long, wiry hair on the flank of one goat to show me what was underneath—a thickening growth of fine, wispy, grayish fluff.

NEVERTHELESS, large numbers of goats are no guarantee of wealth. In the northern region of China known as Inner Mongolia, half of the processing facilities of the nation's largest cashmere company, Erdos, have been lying idle this year, and herders have been eating their goats, which have become less valuable as cashmere generators than they are as dinner.

In China, as in Mongolia, the loosening of Communist economic controls has contributed to a serious oversupply: cashmere production has increased from about nine thousand tons in 1990 to twelve thousand tons in 1998, but prices for raw cashmere have fallen to less than a third of what they were in the early nineties, and as the glut has grown, worldwide demand has fallen. China claims that it has the capacity to produce twenty million cashmere pieces annually, but actual sales in 1998 were six million. Clara Li Fang, a manager at a company called Edenweiss Cashmere, in Shanghai, told me, "Three or four years ago, we could take orders for a hundred thousand pieces from Japan, but last year it was down to ten thousand." Because China produces so much of the world's cashmere, the state of the industry there determines the state of the industry everywhere else. In recent weeks, the Chinese government has stepped in to prevent a further price decline, by issuing loans at favorable rates to the major cashmere companies so they can buy up excess raw product, which herders have been hoarding. That move will, at least, ease the Chinese herders' hardship; but the glut of raw cashmere is likely to remain in warehouses until the global demand for sweaters picks up again.

"The Chinese market just boomed out of all proportion, the way it did in Mongolia," I was told by Ronnie Lamb, who is the executive director of Mongol Amicale, a nine-year-old American-Mongolian joint cashmere venture. I visited Lamb at the Amicale factory in Ulaanbaatar, and joined him for lunch in the factory's dining room, which was bright and sparsely furnished; the only decoration, hanging from one wall like a hunting trophy, was the head of a large wild goat, its curling horns brushing against the low, tiled ceiling.

Lamb is a big-boned Scotsman with a fuzz of graying hair, a ruddy complexion, and an uncompromising tongue. In his view, the foreign economists advising the Mongolian government about opening its markets were "a bunch of bloody idealists," and the Mongolians themselves were like a crowd of unruly but well-meaning children. "The thing that was missing when we first came here was a management class," he said. "The problem was getting people to make a decision—any decision—and getting them to realize that even if it turned out to be a wrong decision they weren't going to have to spend years in Siberia for it."

Amicale supplies woven cashmere fabric to private-label designers such as Ralph Lauren, and is one of a handful of companies that have facilities for processing raw cashmere in Mongolia. Lamb showed me around his plant, taking me first to a chilly warehouse, in which three-hundred-kilo bales were stacked up—about one and three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of raw fibre. "We put it in big bales to eliminate the possibility that someone might walk out with it," he explained. We went on into the factory's sorting room, where bales had been opened and the contents dumped into large bins, and I watched a group of a dozen or so young women wearing head scarves pick over the greasy cashmere—handfuls of dirty-looking grayish fluff with dirt and coarse goat hair mixed in it. They separated it by color: brown, which is the most common cashmere in Mongolia; red, which is rarer; light gray; and white, which is the most highly prized, because it can be dyed in the widest variety of colors.

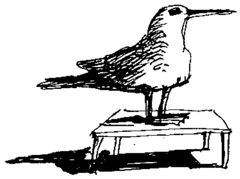
Next, Lamb led me into what he called the dehairing room, a hangar-size space that felt like a sauna and was staffed by workers wearing shorts and sandals. Here a row of clanking machines—big green metal containers—removes the unwanted coarse hair and the dirt: Lamb bent down under one machine to draw out a handful of the discarded matter, and it looked like the residue in a shower drain after a Superbowl team has cleaned off. At the end of each machine was a tub, into which wispy white clouds of pure cashmere tumbled in billows like cotton candy being whisked into existence at a fairground.

Because Amicale does not yet have facilities for spinning and dyeing and weaving its cashmere in Mongolia, this fluff was to be baled up and sent to the firm's factories in England and North Carolina. There it will be spun into thread or yarn and then woven into bolts of fabric to be turned into jackets or coats or knitted into shawls and scarves—all to be sold in stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

The part of the factory that Lamb seemed most interested in, though, was a tiny, darkened room off the warehouse, in which a young woman was peering through a microscope at a slide smeared with a few fibres. She was measuring sample strands from a consignment of raw cashmere that had just been received at the factory to see if it would pass muster. The best cashmere is made of fibres that are fine and long, but, because there is no world standard, garments labelled a hundred-per-cent pure can be of widely varying quality. It is generally accepted by reputable manufacturers that the length of good cashmere fibre is somewhere between thirty-two and thirty-eight millimetres; when the length drops to twenty-five millimetres, the fabric will pill more easily. The fineness of cashmere is what gives it its warmth and softness and loft, Lamb explained, and the width of a Mongolian-cashmere fibre should be no more than sixteen and a half microns, a fraction of the width of a human hair. (Fibre width is largely a matter of genetics, except that young and female goats have finer fibres than old and male goats.) The width of the cashmere under the microscope in Amicale's laboratory measured an encouraging 15.2 microns, and so would be allowed to enter the production cycle.

Quality is a big issue in Mongolia: as the number of goats has grown since the introduction of the market economy, their quality has declined. Much of the stock was corrupted in Communist times by crossbreeding with coarser-haired Angora goats in an effort to boost production. Moreover, now that Mongolia is no longer required to help feed Russian troops, herders are keeping their older male goats instead of slaughtering them. As a result, more coarse fibre is coming onto the market. "The herdsman looks at the male goat as a cash cow, because it produces more fibre," explained Lamb, whose company is currently helping to fund a government drive to improve the stock of Mongolian goats by breeding them with fine-fibred bucks. But it is not easy to encourage Mongolian herders to focus on quality instead of quantity, he added, since they get paid for their cashmere by volume.

In Zaamar, I met a herder named Bazarzagd, who had grown up in a herding family but moved to the city, where he'd worked as a driver. After the economic crisis of the early nineteen-nineties, however, his work had slowed down, and his wife had been laid off from her job as a librarian, so, like many Mongolians, they decided to return to the land. "In terms of welfare, we herders had an easier life under Communism than we have today," he said. "Now, I may call for an ambulance, and the hospital will say, 'If you pay for the gas, we'll come quicker.'" Bazarzagd, who is fifty years old, looks twenty years older, and he is as far removed from the final result of his labors as diamond miners are from Harry Winston. When I asked whether he had any cashmere clothes, he told me that he had some scarves and sweaters, and he started pulling at a purple scarf he was wearing. Outside his *ger*, one of my Mongolian escorts, a young woman from a cashmere company, whispered to me, "He doesn't know what cashmere is. None of the herders do. They can't distinguish it from wool."



In Mongolia, finished cashmere products aren't the status items they have become in the West, even among the residents of the capital city. A few Mongolian companies, such as Buyan and Mana, have made an effort to introduce mildly fashionable colors and styles, but their market has been largely in Japan. Buyan is owned by a man named Jargalsaikhan, a self-made millionaire, who started out as a trader in the late eighties and is one of Mongolia's richest men. He is almost certainly its most flamboyant. When I went to see him, he kept me waiting in his office as he excitedly unpacked and played with a digital video recorder and a laptop computer that a friend had just flown in from Moscow; he owns a Hummer, a Dodge pickup, a Mercedes, and a Land Cruiser, unspeakable riches in a country where the average cashmere factory worker takes home about sixty dollars a month.

Shortly before I left Mongolia, I met a woman named Soyolma, who teaches fashion design at the Mongolian Institute of Culture, in Ulaanbaatar, and is the head of a nongovernmental organization formed to promote Mongolian design. I asked her what she made of the current Western vogue for cashmere. Soyolma was the closest thing I had seen to a Seventh Avenue type in Mongolia: a woman who looked to be in her forties, she was wearing heavy-framed yellow-tinted glasses, had a purplish rinse in her hair, wore a big woollen sweater, kept copies of foreign fashion magazines on her desk, and travelled with her own jar of instant Brazilian coffee.

"I think cashmere is more suitable for someone over forty," she told me. "Young people can wear scarves or gloves or hats of cashmere, but if someone wears a cashmere sweater it will make him look older." Her prohibition against cashmere for the young, though, was not primarily aesthetic; it was practical. "Cashmere is a very warm fabric, so if you wear it at a young age, you get used to it," she explained. "This is a cultural thing. You'd better not wear cashmere young, because when you get older you'll need even warmer things."

WARMTH is hardly the prime motivation for shoppers in TSE on Madison Avenue, where sleek cardigans and pullovers in colors with names like "Fennel" and "Lynx" can be bought for about three hundred dollars apiece. Rather, TSE has had a lot to do with cashmere's relinquishing of its fuddyduddy image. Right now, TSE is exploring cashmere for summer, a new idea.

"We have to get our buyers to understand that women will wear this in the summer, so they shouldn't be afraid," Rebecca Shafer, the company's creative director, told me when I visited the company's Fifth Avenue showroom. Shafer, who is kinetic and ectomorphic, was wearing an extra-small gray TSE V neck and black flannel pants. "If you work in an office, you have air-conditioning," she went on, "so you should let go of your old, stupid mentality and think about what women really need."

What women need this summer, according to TSE, is a stumpy tube of a garment knitted in very fine black cashmere. "This is, like, the new summer cardigan," Shafer said, pulling the thing over her head, then down over her shoulders and folded arms, and snuggling herself in it. The garment looked like a cross between an Italian grandmother's shawl and a mini-straitjacket. "You can just kind of wrap up in it, but if you need to hold a glass in your hand, you can," Shafer went on, poking one hand out suddenly through an unseen opening.

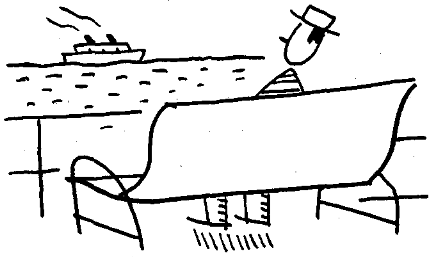
Shafer and her business partner, Lisa Cervantes, formed TSE, in 1988, because, she says, they both loved cashmere but didn't like any of the things that were being made from it. The company is now a sixty-million-dollar business in the United States, and has its own factories in Inner Mongolia. TSE sweaters are sold for between three hundred and a thousand dollars, and TSE's parent company also makes private-label sweaters for other companies, which it declines to name. Last year, TSE hired the innovative Cypriot designer Hussein Chalayan to develop a line of sportswear (the weblike shrug was one of his designs), and it is now planning to launch a more affordable label, using a less-fine raw cashmere to start with. "It will be like TSE but younger in its proportions and less expensive," Shafer said. "It will be, like, a hundred and eighty dollars for a sweater; if it is a bit chunky, it might go to two hundred and fifty dollars."

Those are precisely the price parameters of the sweaters being sold in Banana Republic, and Shafer is frank about her anxiety on seeing cashmere being mass-marketed. "It dilutes us, because there are a lot more places for people to buy cashmere from," she said.

The success of TSE in positioning cashmere as a fashion item means that other, less exclusive, stores are pushing it as well. The off-price chain T. J. Maxx has long stocked cashmere sweaters, and they are now selling for between eighty and two hundred dollars. Laura Cervone, a spokeswoman for the company, told me, "With the price of cashmere declining, our quality is going to go up, so we are going to be able to offer an even better product."

In any event, the most emphatic promotion of cashmere as a mass-market commodity has been done by Banana Republic: its winter ad campaign put posters bearing the single word "Cashmere" in every store window, and also on the sides of bus shelters and phone booths. (The sweaters are manufactured for the company by a well-respected, pricier cashmere label.) The company's press release for its winter cashmere campaign claims that its collection "redefines cashmere as the new American casual of the 90s." Cindy Capobianco, a spokeswoman for Banana Republic, explained, "Our customers can enjoy cashmere every day. It doesn't have to be a special occasion for them to feel a luxurious fabric against the skin, and it is not a single-investment piece, as designer cashmere has been in the past."

This attitude, which is also the attitude of J. Crew and Laundry and any number of other fashion labels that are pushing cashmere, is the kind of thing that the established cashmere companies hate. "Cashmere cannot afford to be a commodity," Ronnie Lamb had told me in Ulaanbaatar. "I think it should be available only to a restricted clientele. I wasn't overjoyed at the fact that the herd had increased in China, because it will make cashmere lose that exoticism—that aura. In my mind, either you can buy it or you can't: there is no middle ground. To me, it is an investment, not a purchase. And once that changes, everything about cashmere changes."



INDEED, the abundance of cashmere in the mass market is of such concern to the cashmere establishment that a trade organization, the Cashmere & Camel Hair Manufacturers Institute, regularly polices the American marketplace, trying to spot low-quality merchandise. I recently visited Karl Spilhaus, the organization's president, in Boston, and he took me along on one of his scouting missions.

We started in Filene's Basement, one of several stores that the C.C.M.I. has sued for alleged labelling violations. (Spilhaus says that a jury trial is expected this year.) Spilhaus walked along a rack of men's coats, plunging his hand inside the collar of each coat to grab its hang tag with the deftness of a Chinatown fishmonger pulling a live eel from a bucket. "That's an illegal mark," he said, squinting through his glasses at a large label reading "Cashmere Blend" that was stapled to the arm of a black coat. "If it's a blend, you are required to state the constituents. I bet that's wool and nylon and a tiny bit of cashmere. Ten per cent doesn't add any significant performance value to the garment," he said. "Less than twenty per cent and you are just trading on the name." Inside was a tiny tag: ten-per-cent cashmere. We passed a bin of tangled cashmere sweaters, and watched a middle-aged man in a windbreaker and a baseball cap sorting through them. I asked Spilhaus what a customer should look for in quality cashmere. "You look for the lustre, the heft, the loft," he said, plucking a sweater from the pile. It was clear that these particular garments were not all they might be in the lustre, heft, and loft departments.

The C.C.M.I. was formed fifteen years ago so that the cashmere industry could act collectively in maintaining cashmere's reputation as a luxury item of dependable and enduring quality, and the organization's aim is both to raise consumer awareness and to keep retailers on guard against selling flawed supplies. When I visited Spilhaus's office, he hung my coat in a closet that contained a stash of jackets and overcoats with large swatches cut out of them. Some of these, he told me, had been sent to a lab in Leeds, England, for DNA analysis—a service that C.C.M.I. offers to retailers and garment manufacturers to determine whether what is being passed off as a cashmere blend is really made from yak hair.

Spilhaus, who is fifty-two, couldn't have looked less like a fashion type. When we met, he was wearing an Aquascutum raincoat and a plain gray suit. But cashmere, good and bad, aroused in him quiet passions. When we were in Filene's Basement, he was visibly offended by some of the goods on display. "The fabric feels dead—it feels dry, and boardy," he said, rubbing a coat sleeve distastefully. But, toward the end of our shopping trip, when we went into a branch of Ermenegildo Zegna, the high-end menswear store, he was captivated. There were some long, unlined duster coats of cashmere, the kind of thing a sharp-dressing Milanese might wear. Spilhaus slipped one on, and the coat swirled around him; he bent an elbow to examine the sleeve more closely, and in the crook of his arm the fabric folded richly, like a beaver's pelt.

"It was a little preachy."

If cashmere is not what it was in terms of iconography, it is also not always what it was in terms of quality: its mass availability has had the effect of driving down the quality of the cheapest sweaters further still.

Dick Forté, who is the president of Dawson Forté Cashmere, the largest importer of cashmere sweaters to the United States, explained this seeming paradox: "Short cashmere, which is twenty millimetres long, can trade for as little as twenty-five dollars a kilo, while long cashmere is now trading at fifty-five dollars a kilo. You cannot make a good sweater out of short fibre." The problem, he said, is going to be especially significant in 1999, as the low-priced raw cashmere that has been sold this year makes its way into stores. "What you are going to find is that newcomers, who are totally cost-conscious, are just going to make a terrible sweater," Forté warned. "It will be a hundred per cent cashmere, but it will be terrible."

The ready availability of cashmere means that the fashion élite has quickly moved on to other, more exclusive fibres. One is *pashmina*, an Indian cashmere made from the down of high-desert goats and woven primarily into shawls, and another is *shatoosh*, an even rarer fibre, made from the down of the Himalayan antelope. It is illegal to import *shatoosh* into this country, because in the harvesting of the crop the antelope is hunted and killed, not herded and combed; not surprisingly, *shatoosh* is an even more coveted fashion item than *pashmina*.

But the democratization of the cashmere industry means only what the democratization of any controlled system always means—that the responsibility for making choices falls to the people, which is to say the consumers. Just as the cashmere business has become something of a free-for-all in Asia, where both fortunes and mistakes can be made, so the American marketplace, with its boundless options, is a place in which the consumer must be both wise and wary.

This was made clear to me in Mongolia one afternoon when a young man who moonlighted as a cashmere trader joined me for tea at my hotel, just off Ulaanbaatar's central Suhkbaatar Square. At twenty-one, he was a member of the first post-Communist generation, and he had the lankiness and the complexion of an adolescent combined with the knowing air of a street hustler. He worked at a magazine, but during the cashmere season, he said, he and his friends turned to a little freelance scam artistry. They would place newspaper ads offering top prices for raw cashmere to herders, he told me, and then, after buying good-quality cashmere from the herders, they would mix poor-quality cashmere in with it, the way drug dealers dilute cocaine with soap powder. They would sell the mixture to a factory, and there sorters would pick it over and send back any cashmere found to be inadequate. Then they would simply take the poor-quality cashmere that had been rejected, remix it with more high-quality cashmere, and again try to palm it off on the same factory. Eventually, enough of the bad stuff would slip through for them to make a profit. "Sometimes we mix dirt in with the raw cashmere, too, to make it heavier," he added. "And there are lots of other tricks we use that I can't tell you about."

The young man's con was an eruption of free-market exuberance, of economic imagination—albeit of a crooked sort—where there had previously been stultifying order and regulation. You had to admire the ingenuity of the gimmick. But you also had to recognize its lesson, which applies in SoHo as much as it does on Suhkbaatar Square: that the price of a free market is eternal vigilance, and so is the price of a really good cashmere sweater. ♦

FICTION

THE PENULTIMATE CONJECTURE

Every genius deserves a slave.

BY LEONARD MICHAELS

FROM the beach in Santa Monica, Nachman could look across the water toward LAX and watch airplanes take off and land. The sight reminded him that he hated to travel. Nevertheless, he'd decided to make the short flight to San Francisco, where he would attend this year's meeting of the Pythagoras Society, an international organization dedicated to pure mathematics. Nachman wanted to hear the featured talk, on the Penultimate Conjecture. It would be given by the Swedish mathematician Björn Lindquist.

Nachman packed a clean shirt, a razor, a toothbrush, and a change of underwear and socks, though he planned to return the same day. He didn't expect to become involved in a discussion, and could think of no friends he'd meet in San Francisco, but any trip held unpredictable elements, and he might decide to stay overnight. Razor, toothbrush, underwear, socks, and shirt went into his briefcase along with a writing pad and some ballpoint pens. He added a bottle of aspirin, too, as if he expected to have a headache. At the airport, he bought a package of chewing gum to relieve the anticipated pain in his ears on takeoff and landing. He disliked flying, with its discomforts and terrors; also having to breathe unhealthy gases.

The flight was uneventful, except for ten minutes of turbulence. However, shortly before landing, an argument erupted a few rows behind him. A passenger and a flight attendant were yelling. It was about something serious. When the plane landed, police rushed into the cabin. Nachman heard shouts and the commotion of a struggle as he shoved past the passengers in the aisle who were gaping toward the rear.

"What the hell happened?" asked a man at the front of the plane, gripping his arm, his eyes virtually crazed with curiosity.

"How would I know?" said Nachman, pulling his arm free and pushing by him. He didn't know because he'd been thinking and scribbling notes about the Penultimate Conjecture. He continued thinking about it as he walked through the airport to the taxi stand. Television reporters, lugging a camera, went past, rushing in the direction Nachman had come from.

THE problem of the Penultimate Conjecture was formulated during the Second World War by brilliant English cryptographers who broke the German code, Enigma. Germans, also brilliant, also broke English codes. Obscure men, and some women, who had a knack for solving puzzles analyzed the coded messages of the enemy, so that nameless soldiers, sailors, and airmen could be literally blown to bits, drowned, and burned alive. A proof of the Penultimate Conjecture would have no such practical consequences—at least none yet known—but for mathematicians it was a glamorous problem indirectly associated with horrendous violence. As a graduate student, Nachman had brooded over it. The problem was exceedingly difficult. He was afraid he might spend years on it and fail to prove anything. A mathematician had only so much time. Nachman then turned to other problems, and built a reputation for solid, indispensable work. Björn Lindquist would know the name Nachman.

As for Lindquist's reputation, it rested on a number of dazzling publications, all co-authored. Mathematicians worked together more than they had in previous years. Lindquist's name appeared first on the publications he co-authored. He was considered a genius for his ability to see the implications of the work of others, and also for his devastating questions. In San Francisco, Lindquist would be the one who was questioned. The sole author of his talk on the Penultimate Conjecture, Lindquist had taken the risk that Nachman had cautiously declined, making a bid for greatness, something far beyond mere reputation.

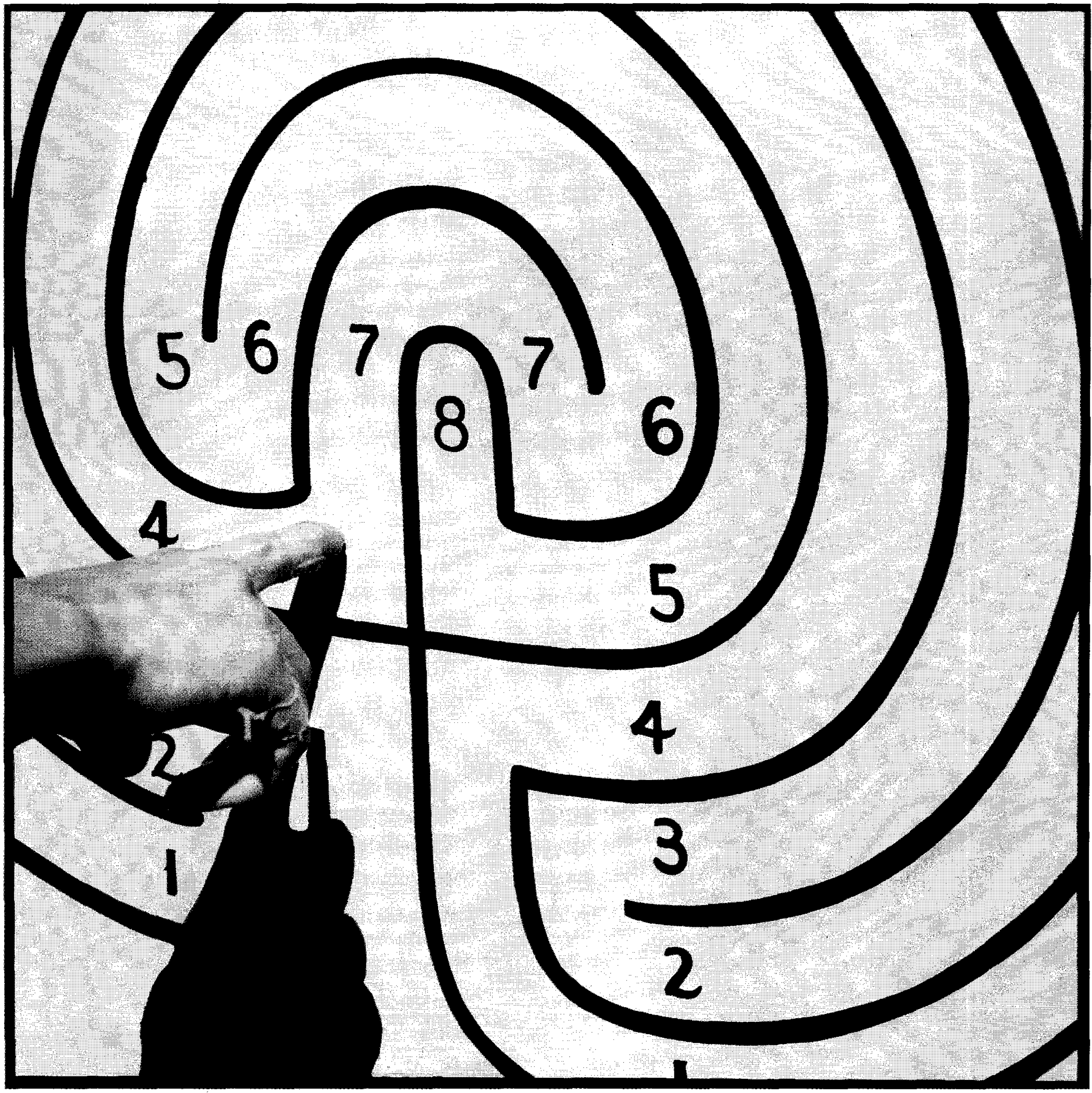
Nachman, who was unusually slow, was never asked to collaborate. It didn't much matter. He preferred to work alone. He had sometimes wondered about returning to the Penultimate Conjecture, but he assumed that even if many mathematicians engaged it seriously, none would be successful. When he was ready, Nachman told himself, the problem would be waiting for his attention. Suddenly it was too late.

According to gossip, Lindquist had an amazing proof. As if the problem had been stolen from him, Nachman was somewhat hurt and suffered a touch of jealousy, but he felt no ill will toward Lindquist. He wanted only to see Lindquist demonstrate his proof. He couldn't wait for him to publish it on the computer or in a paper. He wanted to see him do it in person, in public. Nothing else would have made him buy his own ticket to go to San Francisco in a terrifying airplane, breathing plague.

The taxi from the airport arrived at the hotel an hour before Lindquist's scheduled talk. Nachman sat in the lobby, reviewing the notes that he'd made feverishly during the hour-long flight. He'd worked more quickly than ever before, as if fuelled by drugs, and it almost seemed, now that it was too late, that he was approaching a solution to the problem. It was rather like racing west as the sun goes down to make the day longer. But why should he care? The problem had been solved by Lindquist. In a sense, there was no longer any problem. Immersed in the nonexistent problem, Nachman noticed a crowd of people heading toward the auditorium where Lindquist would talk. Thrusting his notes into his briefcase, he joined them. He felt humble, like a member of a religious congregation. The room was large, and almost every chair was taken. A blackboard had been wheeled to the front. As in a theatre before the curtain rises, the crowd was full of spirited chatter.

Nachman took a chair beside a skinny young man who wore a blue suit of cheap

"LABYRINTH AND BANDAGED FINGER" (1994)/COURTESY JULIE SAUL GALLERY



How many numbers chose him for a friend?

synthetic material. He noticed that the jacket was too big in the shoulders and the lapels seemed asymmetrical, but it was a new suit and the young man obviously felt good in it. He smiled at Nachman. His eyes were greenish yellow, a feral hue, and slanted. They had a strange intelligence and a fine hot savoring look.

The man said, "You're Nachman."

Nachman nodded.

"I'm Nikolai Chertoff. How do you do? I heard you lecture in Kraków."

They shook hands, Nachman muttering, for no reason, "I don't like to travel." Chertoff's eyes were unnerving. To turn away or modify their attention, Nachman asked, "Where are you from, Chertoff?"

"Moscow Communication Labs. You know me?"

The eyes and their attention were unchanging.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be so sorry. Nobody knows me. I published one paper in a Russian journal of robotics. Who read it? Nobody."

"What is the paper about?"

"Of no importance. Who cares? But everybody knows Nachman. It should be Nachman who solved the Penultimate Conjecture."

"I walked away from it many years ago. Lindquist solved it."

"If you say so."

"What do you mean—if I say so?"

"Do you believe Lindquist solved it?"

"Of course."

"If I were you, I would be inclined to kill, not believe."

"Kill?"

"Look, here he is. Your worst enemy."

There was a flurry of applause as Lindquist walked to the front. Nachman

"Among them, my children have eighteen years of accumulated experience harassing their mother!"

• •

was startled, but with a surge of anxious pleasure he joined the others, including Chertoff, in applause. Nachman whispered, "Why did you say that? My worst enemy."

"If he's a mathematician, what are you?"

Chertoff's face assumed an expression of disdain, pretending to the attitude he expected in Nachman.

"There's room for more than one mathematician, Chertoff."

Chertoff grinned. "Sure, sure. You're in the same field and you do the same work. Like Newton and Leibniz. Maybe five other mathematicians also discovered the calculus. Plenty of room."

The greenish-yellow eyes narrowed with laughter. As Chertoff's head tipped back, his sharp, prominent teeth pointed at Nachman.

Nachman laughed, too, though with imperfect delight. Chertoff's comments had touched a nerve. In truth, Nachman's feelings toward Lindquist were darkened by thoughts of himself. He should have taken the risk. He should have been more like Lindquist, more manly. "Enough, Nachman," said Nachman to himself. "Let it go. You didn't fly to San Francisco to reproach yourself."

LINDQUIST was tall and lean and pale. His blond hair was streaked grayish-white. He had cold, light-blue eyes and a wide tragic mouth, bent at the corners as if it might release a wail. He began abruptly, pacing before the blackboard as he talked, stopping to write equations. Evidently, he had chosen to suggest the nature of his proof rather than exhibit it in exhaustive detail, but each time he wrote an equation he was taken by a rush of excitement. Unable to contain himself, he proceeded to offer more, then more. His fingers squeezed the chalk hard, and it broke. He continued with the broken piece, and then it, too, broke, and he snatched up a fresh stick. His English was first-rate, Oxford faintly mixed with Stockholm. The audience, submerged in silence, was like a many-eyed crocodile, the body suspended underwater, inert. The chalk squeaked as Lindquist dragged it against the board.

Beautiful work, thought Nachman. Tears formed, blurring his vision slightly, but then—actually, within the first several minutes of Lindquist's demonstration—even as Nachman thought it was beautiful he'd begun to suffer a dark excitement. He tried to ignore it as Lindquist progressed. He even nodded once or twice, a motion of assent to Lindquist's voice, and he exerted himself to focus strictly on Lindquist's demonstration, but he had seen where the proof was going, and, in the matter of numbers, Nachman was among those who see actively, even aggressively. There are things one knows—who knows how?—and Nachman felt it in himself, a shadow passing through his cells. Nachman knew Lindquist had failed. He sensed the conceptual error. He might have raised his hand and stopped the demonstration, but it would have been disruptive, unmannerly, immodest. He'd be obliged to make a show of himself and indicate Lindquist's mistake. Nachman's sense of it was instinctive, not yet analyzed, but he'd have bet his life that if he tried he could specify it. He would say, "I think I could suggest . . ." Stammering, apologetic, even pretending not to have a good grasp of the problem, Nachman calculated that it would take him about five minutes to demolish the proof and Lindquist.

Nachman couldn't do it. Not to Lindquist, not to anyone in public. But the feeling was there, a blood ferocity. It shocked him. In his silence, doing nothing, he felt as if he'd struck a blow. It didn't make him feel good. The opposite was true. Nachman felt very bad. Lindquist was handsome. Heroic facial bones made him look like a courageous knight. Nachman, a lowly foot soldier, had knocked Lindquist off his horse. On his back, pinned to the earth by the weight of his armor, Lindquist was helpless. Nachman kneeled above him with a dagger. Lindquist said, "Spare me, Nachman. I'll give you Chantal."

"Who?"

"Chantal. My slave girl."

Thus Nachman drifted from mathematics. He no longer cared about the demonstration, though he sat like everyone else and watched as if the evolving proof were valid. Lindquist's chalk continued striking and squiggling rapidly, trailing equations, shedding streams of fine white powder. Wrong, thought Nachman. The word beat tremendously in his heart, and the desire to speak raged in his bowels against an unrelenting force of polite repression. An unknown mathematician could gain a reputation in minutes if he had the courage to speak up and undo Lindquist. None spoke up. Lindquist talked and scribbled. Silence prevailed as if everyone were hypnotized, possessed by the Swede's fame and extraordinary presence. Gaunt, large-boned, his pallor belonged to a man of vision.

The talk ended. Nachman participated in the applause, showing respect for his colleagues and for Lindquist's fine qualities. He even felt affection for Lindquist, and hoped somebody would give the Swede a prize. But the Penultimate Conjecture remained a conjecture. Nachman couldn't deny that he wasn't displeased. There were only a few questions from the audience, and then it was over. Chertoff stood up. Nachman noticed that his bow tie was fixed to his collar with metal clips. His neck was skinny, and his Adam's apple slid up and down when he said, "If you visit Moscow, Nachman, please do ring me." Reaching into the inside pocket of his hideous jacket, Chertoff withdrew a business card. Nachman took it.

"I must smoke a cigarette," said Chertoff. He drew one from a pack and lit it, then sighed smoke. "What a proof."

Nachman said, "Were you pleased?"

"Lindquist did good work. What did you think?"

"Same as you."

Nachman had hoped that they might share a moment of mathematical brotherhood. Instead, like everyone else, Chertoff assented to the demonstration. Nachman felt himself closing up, shrinking from connection. It had always been like this. Nachman worked alone, lived alone, thought alone. He didn't need solidarity with Chertoff. Such a peculiar fellow.

"I see it in your eyes," said Chertoff. "You think I let you down."

"Nonsense."

"Not nonsense. To me the proof is good. I'm not you, Nachman. How many numbers have chosen you as a friend? Fifty? Seventy-five? I have maybe five, and I'm not always too sure of their friendship. How many, Nachman? Ninety? Sure, you have ninety. Negatives, fractions, rational, complex—they come when you call. For you mathematics is a big party. But I am like most people—only five. Less is revealed to us, so we think the proof is good. You want to know something? It might as well be good. For six months, a year—good or no good—we'll think it's good. But you, Nachman, you don't think it's good. You're alone. Worse yet, you're frightened."

"Excuse me. I must give my congratulations to Lindquist."

"You must run away. See?"

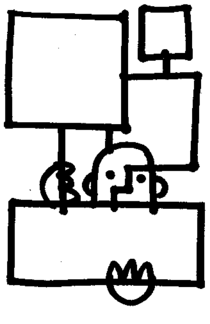
"I see that you're impertinent, Chertoff."

"Go, run to him, give him a kiss. When you're in Moscow, ring me. We'll talk about real things."

Chertoff's feral eyes surrendered their interest in Nachman as he glanced toward the corners of the room. He half-smiled, slying winking at Nachman. "There are more women here than I expected."

NACHMAN immediately forgot Chertoff and joined the group that had formed around Lindquist, while trying to think how to make a pleasant remark, with perhaps the slightest hint that might give Lindquist pause. Someone whispered to Lindquist, and he looked toward Nachman, spotting him at the edge of the group. He extended his hand, urging Nachman forward. "Thank you for coming to hear my talk, Nachman. I feel honored."

Shaking Lindquist's long cool hand, Nachman decided not to give any hints. Lindquist was disarming in his friendliness, which made it harder, not easier, to suggest his failure. Besides, Lindquist was extremely quick. He might see everything instantly, regardless of how subtle the hint, and he'd be furious because Nachman hadn't been forthright. Others would sympathize with Lindquist. Even when they saw that Nachman was right—no, especially when they saw that he was right. Better to keep his mouth shut. Nachman knew what he knew. A difficult knowledge. Why bring himself into bad odor? People need to believe, which requires an irrationality, a suspension of critical faculties, an abnegation of will, a spreading of the thighs. If they knew what Nachman thought, they'd despise and revile him. Chertoff was right. Nachman was frightened.



The Swede looked with cool blue incisiveness into Nachman's brown eyes. "What do you say, Nachman? It was all right?"

As if speaking from a trance, Nachman said, "Wonderful."

"Wonderful? Did I play the cello? I only did mathematics. I saw you in the audience and watched your face. It didn't look full of wonder."

Nachman shouldn't have said "wonderful." A bleat of mindless enthusiasm. Helpless to undo the word, Nachman repeated it: "Wonderful."

Lindquist nodded gravely. "All right, then, wonderful. Such praise coming from you is . . ." He made a noise, not an intelligible word. His tone was grim, as if he detected in the word "wonderful" a form of contempt. "Do you have time to talk, Nachman? If you want to say something, I want to listen."

"Now?" Nachman had intended to say he had nothing to say. With the question—"Now?"—he surprised himself. Where did the word come from? It made him feel like a liar.

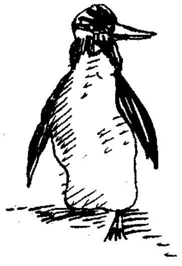
"Lunch tomorrow. Could you call my room in the morning?"

"You're staying at this hotel?"

Another question. Of course he was staying at this hotel. The whole conference was here. Lindquist looked puzzled and mock injured, pouting as if Nachman's question were an oblique insult. "Are you being evasive, Nachman? Would you prefer not to meet for lunch?"

"I will," said Nachman. "I'll call." His voice was eager, compensating for the imagined insult. The talk had been stressful, making Lindquist hypersensitive, but there had been no insult. Unless he'd been struck by a critical thought ray from Nachman's subconscious. Nachman remembered Chertoff's question: "If he's a mathematician, what are you?" He'd meant that Lindquist's existence, merely that, threatened Nachman's, and vice versa. Confused and embarrassed, Nachman backed away, repeating, "I'll call," and turned, hurrying to the door, then to a men's room, where he shoved into an empty stall, dropped his briefcase, and—no time to spare—threw up. Weak and dizzy, he washed his face. He did it to clean himself and not let himself think. It came to him that he, too, was a believer. He believed there was good and bad. He'd been bad not to speak up when Lindquist asked for his reaction. Nachman saw again the solemn handsome face and heard the simple appeal: "It was all right?"

Bad not to answer. Bad not to tell the truth. But how could it matter if Nachman's mere existence was potentially dangerous? Nachman dried his face, and then, staring into the mirror above the sink, said to himself, "Let him have the solution. I'll settle for the slave girl."



NACHMAN left the men's room and wandered into the hotel lobby, dazed and disoriented. He looked about for people he knew. Where was Chertoff? To see the hideous blue suit, the ferocious eyes and teeth would be a blessing. Nachman needed someone to talk to. Moving through the crowd, he sensed the eyes turning in his direction. He knew he was being recognized, but he recognized nobody. The crowd seemed too young. The conversations on every side—in Italian, French, German, Russian, Japanese—were estranging. Mathematicians had flown in from everywhere. Nachman had surely met a good many of them, but he'd never been a sociable fellow, never made sure to remember names. Groups of two and three clustered in the lobby, talking with frenzied energy, as if desperate for communion. He wandered around, feeling awkward and self-conscious, scrutinizing nametags, which he considered rude. Some faces were familiar, but no names. He couldn't bring himself to approach a familiar face without knowing a name. With exasperation, he asked himself why he was in this hotel lobby. Nobody was talking to him. Nachman supposed he looked forbidding, inapproachable. He had no reason to stay.

Planes left for Los Angeles every half hour. Nachman could be in Santa Monica, in his own house, well before midnight. Tomorrow he'd phone the hotel and leave a message at the desk for Lindquist, apologizing. Not for missing their lunch but for what Nachman couldn't tell him, though he'd say it was for missing lunch. Nachman remembered saying, "I will."

He felt like a criminal, as if he were fleeing, when he saw the taxis at the curb, in front of the hotel, but he stepped quickly up to one of them and jumped inside. "The airport," he said. The taxi nudged into traffic. Minutes later it was free of city streets, passing other cars along the highway. Nachman sat with his briefcase on his lap and looked at the gleaming blue of San Francisco Bay and across to the tawny hills in the east. He wasn't sorry he'd made the trip, yet his heart was fraught with regret even as it swelled and beat against his rib cage with triumph. Abruptly from this swelling and beating issued a strangled cry: "Turn around, please. I must go back."

Nachman was more embarrassed than surprised by his outburst. Would the taxi-driver think he was crazy? They drove now in loud silence. Nachman sat rigidly, as if braced to receive a blow. His eyes were fixed on the back of the taxi-driver's head, expecting him to question the order, or simply ignore it and drive on to the airport. But the driver took the first exit off the highway, smoothly reversing direction and heading back to San Francisco. Then he said, "You forgot something at the hotel?" The voice was a gentle tenor and seemed incongruous with the man. He was big, heavy, broad-shouldered, and black.

"Yes," said Nachman.

"Happens."

"I'm sorry. I feel very foolish."

"No problem. Maybe you don't really want to leave the city."

"I don't always know what I want."

"That sounds like my wife. We go out for ice cream, it's always a crisis. I say, 'Pick any flavor. You don't like it, we'll throw it away and get another. Just pick.' But she stands at the counter having a nervous breakdown over vanilla or pistachio."

"That's it. I'm having a crisis," Nachman said to himself.

At the hotel, Nachman went to the desk. He intended to phone Lindquist's room and ask if they could meet that evening, but before he could get the clerk's attention Chertoff appeared.

"Nachman, you're still here. It was my impression you were leaving."

"What do you want?"

"Want? Nothing. Are you angry, Nachman?"

"What do you want?"

"I believe you are angry."

"Are you going to tell me to kill Lindquist?"

"Did I upset you?"

"Yes, you upset me."

"I meant no harm. My way of speaking is too strong on occasion. Forgive me. What I said is only because I am your great admirer. I would like to be your friend. Let me buy you a drink. Over there is a pleasant bar."

"I have to phone Lindquist."

"Of course, but later. Even next week the bad news will not be too late."

"How do you know I have bad news?"

"As a mathematician, I don't hope to know what you'll say. As a man, I know everything. Please," said Chertoff, taking Nachman's arm, drawing him away toward the bar. Nachman didn't resist.

Chertoff asked what Nachman would have, then ordered. Shoulder to shoulder at the bar, with drinks before them, Nachman felt an intimacy he needed very much, and yet it seemed he was being subjected to it, somewhat like a child, as if for his own good. Neither of them spoke for more than a minute. At last Nachman said, "I should tell him. Do you agree?"

He turned to look directly at Chertoff's face. Chertoff, looking with equal directness at Nachman, produced a ferocious smile, as if he'd been given permission to be fully himself. His eyes, in the smiling pressure, narrowed with catlike satisfaction. His lips swept wide over the large, thrusting teeth. He said, "Nachman, I don't give a shit."

"You're some friend, Chertoff."

"A good friend. I think only what you think—which is that you should solve the problem."

"When I was young . . . maybe."

"Do you have a better reason to live?"

"What a question! It reminds me, I dreamed during Lindquist's lecture. Only a few seconds, but I dreamed that I was about to kill him. He begged me to spare his life. He promised me his slave girl."

"I am touched that you are—how do you say it?—sharing this dream with me."

Nachman shrugged. "You know what it means?"

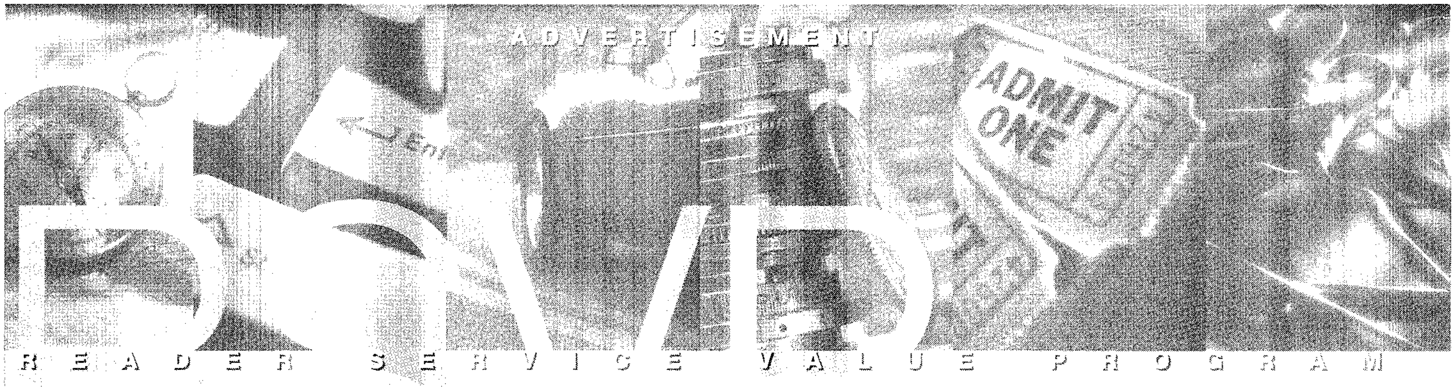
"The spoils of war, Nachman. It is about the spoils of war. Remember the Iliad? Poor Achilles. His slave girl, Briseis, is seized by Agamemnon. Since childhood I have loved and yearned for Briseis. You know, the poem is even more wonderful in Russian than in Homeric Greek." Chertoff boomed the opening lines in Russian. Heads turned along the bar to stare at him. Then he whispered, "Nachman, you must take the slave girl."

"I must?"

"And you must kill Lindquist, too."

"It's not in my nature."

"You have no choice, my friend," said Chertoff as he put an arm around Nachman's shoulders, and drew him close, and kissed him on the cheek in the Russian manner. ♦



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8	LIME (2 defs.)
9	DR + IFT (*fit* anag.)
10	G(ATE + F)OLD
12	CREW (initial letters)
14	S + LED
15	FI(N)ANCE + D
17	ST + EVE
18	RISE (*ryes* hom.)
19	S + CHUBERT (*butcher* anag.)

DOWN

1	BUDG(i)ES
2	O + KRA (*ark* rev.)
3	DEF + END (*fed* rev.)
4	LICORICES (anag.)
5	A + MU-LET
6	NEED (*knead* hom.)
7	KITTENISH (anag.)
11	CLI(p) + NIC(k)
12	C(ANT)AB
13	WI(D)EST
15	FIRS(t)
16	EVER (anag.)

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THE SKY LINE

ATHENS ON THE INTERSTATE

A neoclassical designer attempts to civilize Atlanta.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Rodney Mims Cook, Jr., insisted that I meet him at the Piedmont Driving Club as soon as I arrived in Atlanta, even though it was closed. He went to some trouble to make certain that the club, his club, opened its doors on a Monday—the one day of the week on which Atlanta society traditionally finds someplace else to eat and drink—because the Piedmont Driving Club very clearly demonstrates, if one had somehow forgotten, that Atlanta is not entirely a city of glass office towers set astride shopping malls. It is an easy thing to forget in much of the city. Atlanta's most famous thoroughfare, Peachtree Street, is Wilshire Boulevard with a Southern accent: a line of office and apartment towers, strip malls, gas stations, and hotels. For most of its length, it is not much pleasanter to stroll on than an interstate highway. Atlanta grew large and powerful in the age of the automobile, and underneath its thin Georgia veneer it has a lot more in common with Houston than with Savannah.

The Piedmont Driving Club, which attained a certain notoriety recently as the setting for satiric scenes in Tom Wolfe's novel "A Man in Full," was established in the nineteenth century as the Gentlemen's Driving Club, and provided a place for Atlanta's gentry to cavort in carriages and broughams. The clubhouse was built in 1887, but it didn't really come into its own until the nineteen-twenties, when it was renovated and expanded by Philip Trammell Shutze, one of the great classicists of modern times, who turned an old, farmhouselike building into a sprawling complex of dining rooms, bars, lounges, and a ballroom. Today, the building is a curious mixture of elegant neoclassical details and graceless remnants of fairly recent renovations, like the acoustical-tile ceiling in a room lined with exquisite mahogany panelling. The place has the feel of a rich, slightly bland country club that somehow cut loose from its golf course and drifted back toward the center of town. I liked seeing it empty: the Driving Club without its Drivers, except for Rodney Cook, who is a typical Old Guard member. Many of the newer members are more like Charlie Croker, Wolfe's overextended real-estate-developer protagonist, who made his fortune building glass office towers and created a private world surrounded by symbols of old money.

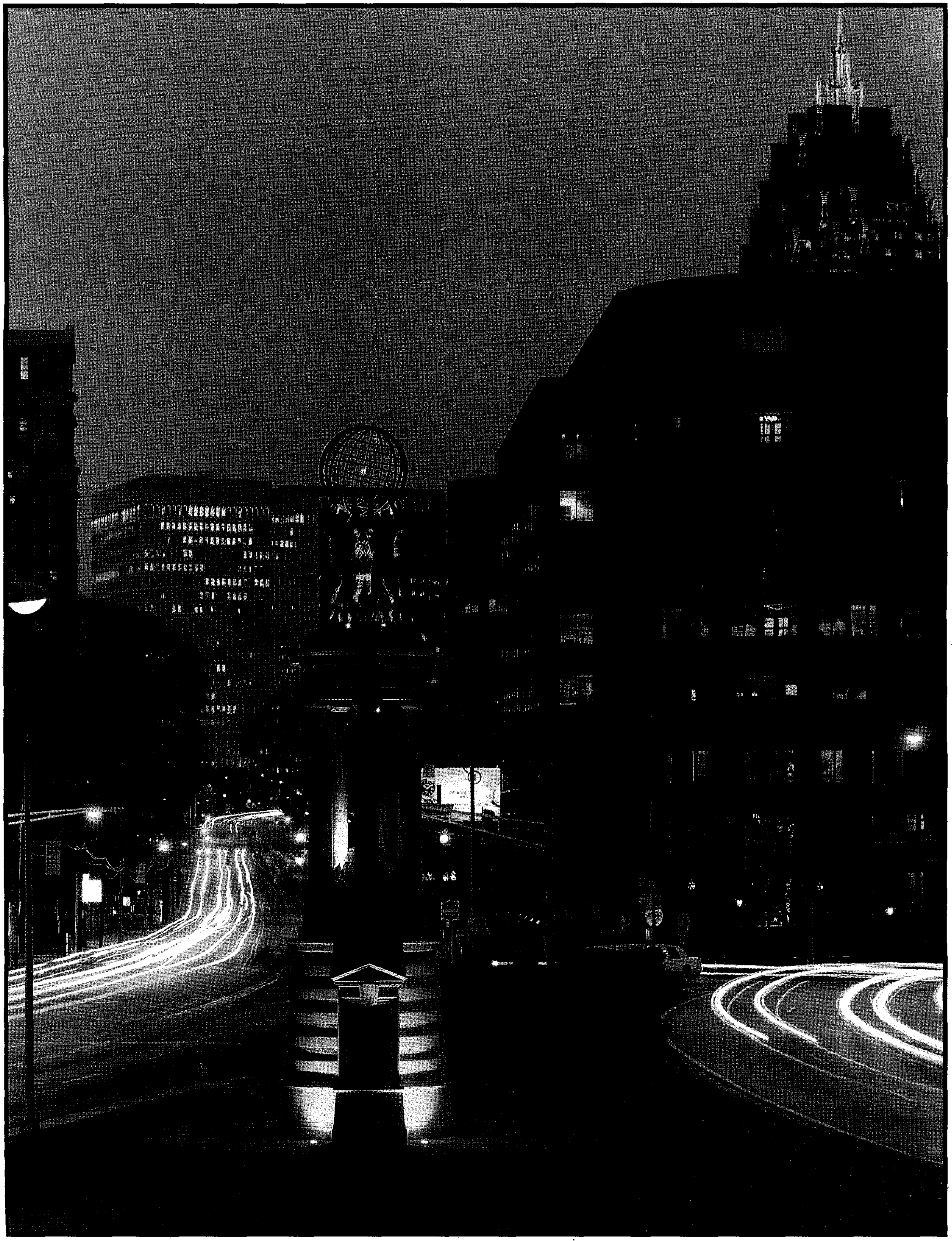
When you meet Cook, you wonder why Tom Wolfe didn't build a character around him as a foil to Charlie Croker, except that maybe it would have been too easy. Croker eats people like Rodney Cook for lunch. Cook is an affable and quiet man of forty-one who wears tweed jackets and khaki pants and projects the earnest demeanor of a missionary, which is more or less what he believes himself to be. He is a prominent member of a small band of young American classical designers, people who are determined to mark the end of the twentieth century with pediments and Doric columns. Many of them, like the architects in the firm of Ferguson, Shamamian & Rattner, are based in New York, where new Wall Street money seeking to look old provides ample call for their services. Doing this kind of work in Atlanta is more of a challenge.

Rodney Cook aspires to be the kind of figure Philip Trammell Shutze was. Shutze, who died in 1982, at the age of ninety-two, scattered mansions of remarkable elegance, inventiveness, and finesse across the wealthier sections of Atlanta. Cook himself grew up frolicking in one of the greatest Shutze houses, which was owned by an uncle. His father-in-law, James Robinson III, the former chairman of American Express, was raised in another Shutze mansion—the house that Tom Wolfe purloined as the home of the tycoon Inman Armholster in "A Man in Full." Wolfe described it as an "Italian Baroque palazzo . . . sheer homage to conspicuous consumption." Cook idolized Shutze, whom he met when he was going to school, and that kept him, he thinks, on track. "My friends were going in classical and coming out modern, to my horror," he says. "I mentioned this to Mr. Shutze, and he said, 'I'm sorry, Mr. Cook. You're going to have a life of misery.' But I pushed on."

Cook doesn't live in a Shutze house now. Until recently, he and his wife, Emily, and their two daughters lived in an apricot-colored mini-Italianate stucco palazzo of his design. They sold it so that they could buy a sixty-acre estate in Buckhead, a Beverly Hills-like mix of glass towers, shopping malls, and mega-mansions where the richest citizens of the city live, and where Cook is developing an enclave of classically styled houses. His office on the grounds of the estate is a renovated stable, which he expanded into a residence for his family. Until the house, a turreted structure that looks something like a Russian dacha, was ready, they lived with Emily Cook's grandmother, Josephine Robinson, in a huge modern high-rise apartment that Rodney Cook outfitted with enough classical trim to obliterate all traces of the original architecture.

Cook wants classical architecture to be something more than fancy dress for the rich. He wants to remake the whole cityscape. He has had one public commission: a small museum for the work of the nineteenth-century painter Jasper Cropsey in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. A vaguely Baroque jewel box of a building, it was finished in 1994. In Atlanta, however, he is under siege—or, at any rate, that is how he sees it. "There is a climate of hostility here to what I'm trying to do," he says, and explains that it is a kind of "hostility to beauty."

When Philip Trammell Shutze was designing buildings, the traditional nature of the architecture expressed the certainty of the social order. Irony was uncalled for, and the striking forms of modernism were barely known. But these are ironic, not to say ambiguous, times. Modernism cannot be denied,



The World Athletes Monument is a bastion of classicism in a garish cityscape. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

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and neoclassical and Renaissance and Georgian and Baroque buildings, however well executed, risk looking like chic stage sets, pretty but shallow. Cook talks of beauty and proportion and history in a city that defines its architecture in terms of depreciation and marketing and easy access to the interstate.

REAL-LIFE Charlie Crokers, of which Atlanta has plenty, should have made quick work of Rodney Cook long ago, but, oddly enough, they haven't. Cook has had an interesting effect on the city's corpus, if not on its soul. A couple of years ago, he managed, with the coöperation and the financial support of Prince Charles, the patron saint of contemporary classicists, to erect a fifty-five-foot-tall monument at Pershing Point, one of Atlanta's prime intersections, along Peachtree Street. A round structure with five columns crowned with bronze figures holding up a globe, it was intended to suggest a tie between the classical tradition in architecture and the Olympics, which were held in Atlanta in 1996. It is officially called the World Athletes Monument, although it is popularly known as the Prince Charles monument, and—for reasons that would have been impossible to anticipate—it has ended up as a memorial to the Prince's late wife. When Diana was killed, grieving Atlantans seized upon the site as the locus of their emotions. Crowds thronged the tiny traffic island on which the monument sits, depositing flowers and lingering through the night.

Cook's success in getting the Prince's monument built followed a failed attempt to impose his vision on Atlanta in a more grandiose manner. In 1992, he proposed putting a huge Beaux Arts-style plaza of his design in Piedmont Park, which is somewhat run-down and just happens to be beneath the windows of the Piedmont Driving Club. An anonymous donor—who was thought in some Atlanta circles to be connected with Cook and his wife's family—offered to foot the ten-million-dollar bill. This project was also intended to mark the Olympics, but it was soon mired in local politics, and was ultimately rejected as being too fancy, too much Rodney Cook's own, too much a piece of noblesse oblige to be in tune with the democratic, free-flowing spirit that the city hoped to convey through its public spaces during the Olympic Games.

Not that there is much public space of any kind in Atlanta. When the Prince Charles monument suddenly became central to Atlanta's civic life, it was not only because of Diana's husband's connection to it but also because there aren't a lot of places in the city that fulfill the traditional function of a communal gathering place. If Atlantans feel like congregating, where are they to go? Do they pour into the parking lot at the Lenox Square mall? Take over the field at the Georgia Tech football stadium? Maybe they could assemble in the atrium of the Hyatt Regency Hotel. As the architect Charles Moore once noted about Los Angeles, where would you go to start a revolution?

The extent to which the monument seems to have settled into the fabric of the city suggests that traditional urban forms can still have an impact, even in a city as wedded to the automobile and urban sprawl as Atlanta is. Rodney Cook certainly saw it that way. He looked around the triangular, grassy site and noticed that there was an empty lot beside it, and he began to wonder if he could make the monument the focal point of something bigger; with a little effort, he thought, he could turn the traffic island into a traditional piazza, right on Peachtree Street. And so Cook and his partner, an Atlanta architect named Peter Polites (Cook himself is not technically an architect, and collaborates with Polites on most of his work), designed an office building to fill the empty lot, closing off the west side of the site and giving the place at least the beginnings of the qualities of a real urban square. If the proposed structure is built—and Cook and others are trying to find financing to develop it themselves—it would be Atlanta's first office building with a façade inspired by the Farnese Palace, Sangallo and Michelangelo's mid-sixteenth-century Roman masterpiece.

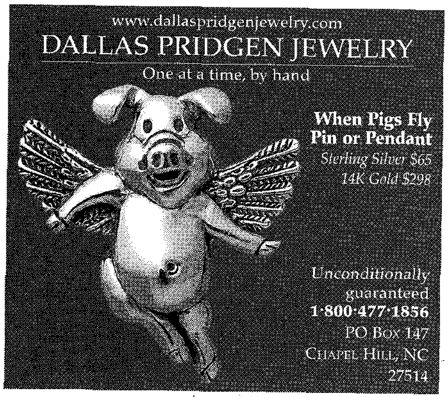
The building proposed for the Prince's monument site seems like an earnest and endearing affectation until you consider the grim legacy of architecture in Atlanta. There is no modern building that even approaches the stature of New York's Seagram Building or Lever House. In a city where most medium-sized office buildings look like pint-size versions of bigger ones, the notion of a structure that is a nicely proportioned seven or eight stories is itself radical.

The ersatz Palazzo Farnese would give Cook, who has thus far designed houses, apartment interiors, and the little museum in upstate New York, his first major civic building. (Neither Cook nor Polites actually created the design for the World Athletes Monument, it should be said, though Cook was very much its impresario. The specific design was the result of a competition open to students affiliated with Prince Charles's institute for the study of classical architecture. The winner was a young Russian, Anton Glikine.) The scheme makes sense not because the building is a piece of classical architecture but because, if it is built, it will be a piece of classical city planning. If there is one area in which modernism has failed abysmally, it is in creating civilized urban spaces.

CAN you graft old-fashioned urban space onto a postwar city? That Cook wants to try makes his proposal something more than merely charming. Most cities defined by the automobile have been resistant to such attempts; cars are just too overwhelming, and the cityscape of freeway interchanges, wide boulevards, parking garages, and shopping malls that they create has such power and presence in its own right, not to mention scale, that small, pedestrian-oriented places inserted into the middle of it usually end up looking trite and silly. That's certainly the case with, say, CityWalk, at Universal Studios, in Los Angeles, a street of stores and restaurants and theatres; it's hard to tell whether it is a street masquerading as a theme park or a theme park masquerading as a street. So, too, with Two Rodeo Drive, the upscale little shopping mall in the middle of Beverly Hills which has been designed as a faux European street. Cuteness is not the antidote to the plague of the automobile-oriented city. Not that anyone will dismiss Cook's new square, if it ever gets built, as too cute. While the piazza would indeed have the Prince's monument as its centerpiece, it would also have a couple of on-ramps to Interstate 85 swooping through the middle of it. Apparently, the ramps cannot be moved, even though the Georgia Department of Transportation is a big supporter of the project.

The square could end up being no more than a sweet-natured irrelevance in the sprawl of the city, which is how many Atlantans view the Prince Charles monument already. Yet, while not a great work by any means, it resonates with a pleasant if not a particularly profound unself-consciousness, and manages to rise above kitsch. The monument does something else, too, which may in the end turn out to be its real justification. It addresses as nothing else has a certain schizophrenic aspect of the architecture of Atlanta. For the last couple of generations, traditional architecture and modern architecture in the city have been set on opposite sides of a firm divide. Not for nothing did Tom Wolfe portray Charlie Croker as living in an old mansion in Buckhead while making his money as a builder of glass office towers along the interstate. Wolfe had it exactly right. In Atlanta, that's what you do once you hit a certain demographic category. Classical architecture is what you live in, and modern architecture is what you work in. The number of modern houses of significant quality in Atlanta is very small. Atlantans want to live in Philip Trammell Shutze houses, but they expect to go to work in John Portman towers. Rodney Cook and Peter Polites are attempting to break through this divide, to build a public realm of traditional, rather than modern, elements, thus repudiating the gentleman's agreement under which architecture has been practiced in this city for generations. They want to bring classicism out into the open, coaxing from it some response to the wretchedly automobilized cityscape that the last half century has created.

It may be naïve to believe that classicism will succeed in doing that in Atlanta any better than it has managed to elsewhere: the panelled libraries of the real-life Charlie Crokers, self-indulgent symbols of an arriviste class, do nothing to push the art of architecture forward. And behind them lurks, as always, the danger of the theme park, the risk that the unpleasantness of the modern city will be replaced by the coy disingenuousness of a make-believe old-fashioned one. But it's hard to deny that Rodney Cook's vision of the city represents, at the very least, a break from the architectural sanctimony on which so much of Atlanta has been built. ♦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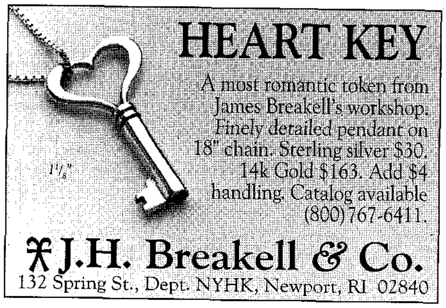
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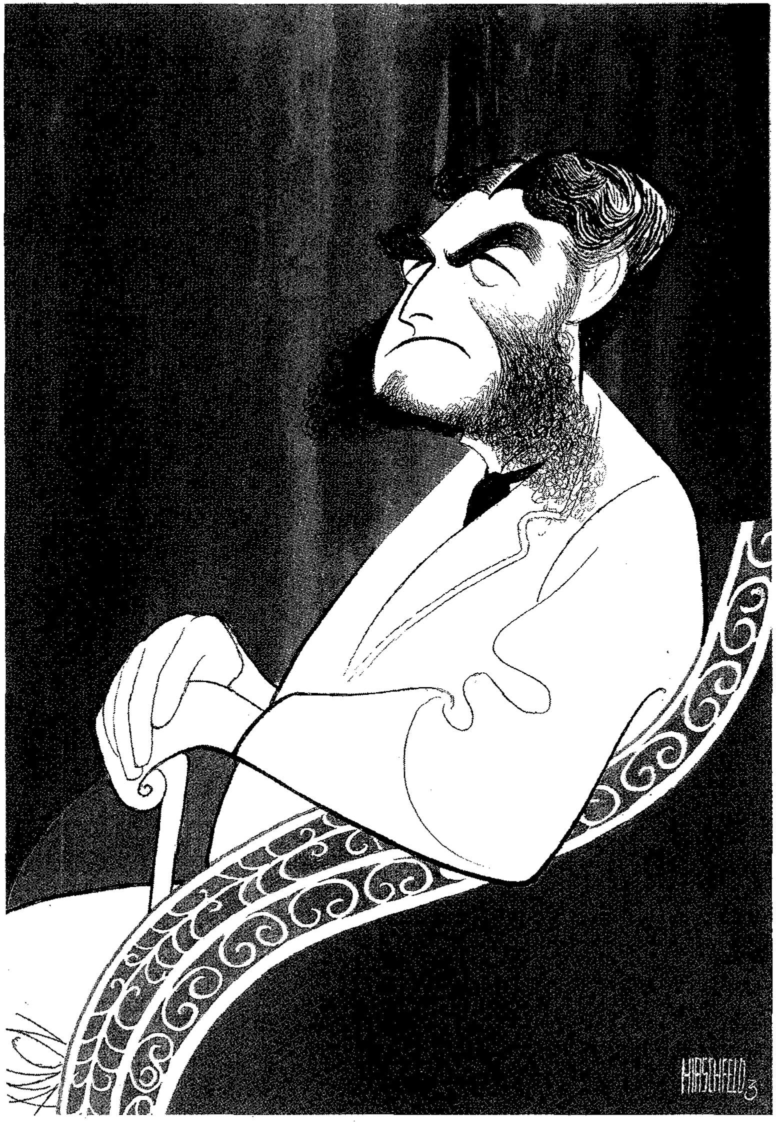
BOOKS

POETRY AND PRINCIPLE

Why did the muse leave Matthew Arnold stranded?

BY ANTHONY LANE

WHAT did Matthew Arnold do? The figure who emerges from Ian Hamilton's new book, "A Gift Imprisoned: The Poetic Life of Matthew Arnold" (Basic Books; $24), is certainly a many-splendored thing: poet, critic, educationalist, connoisseur of the mournful cadence, and all-around harried conscience of the nineteenth century. Above all, he was the proud owner and manager of one of the most formidable sets of whiskers in Victorian England; whatever his other accomplishments, lyrical or polemical, he set a standard of personal shrubbery that few could hope to equal. Insofar as you can discern a face behind the hedge, the expression that you meet in most photographs of Arnold is a perfect balance of the severe and the serene: the chin is firm, leading from the front, but a low-lidded languor in the eyes hints at an irredeemable habit of reverie. Here is a gentleman who, you tell yourself, achieved much in life but also spent his idle hours, such as they were, wondering what those achievements were worth, and what other lives he might have striven to lead.



The ex-poet and Schools Inspector was a balance of the severe and the serene.

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What kept Arnold from idleness, especially in his later years, was a solemn mission to spread the word. The word in question varied from "culture" and "perfection" to "civilization" and, on a good day, "God," but the refrain was constant: there were other and better lives that the general populace could, like the poet himself, strive to lead. In "Culture and Anarchy," for example, first published in 1869, Arnold turned to the question of America. He had not yet been there, but that didn't stop him from knowing what was wrong with the place: "Earnest young men at schools and universities, instead of conceiving salvation as a harmonious perfection only to be won by unreservedly cultivating many sides in us, conceive of it in the old Puritan fashion, and fling themselves ardently upon it in the old, false ways." Only Arnold could manage to sound so Puritan in his cool dismissal of Puritan intensity. Yet, behind the frown, what he advocates here is a liberality of demeanor and faith; the word "unreservedly" could be read as the first step on the long road to multiculturalism. No wonder Arnold has become so crucial a witness in the case of America vs. America. If you happen to deplore the closing of the American mind, it may feel bracing to recruit an evangelizing classicist who can open it up again. The bulk of the United States, Arnold said, consisted of "a livelier sort of Philistine than ours . . . but left all the more to himself and to have his full swing." That sounds vicious, but by "Philistine" Arnold simply meant the middle class; if it could "add to its many and great virtues the spirit of delicacy," then all would be well. Whether delicacy could be funded out of the budget surplus, he declined to say.

All this seems a far cry from Laleham, on the river Thames, where Arnold was born in 1822. However, he was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, and that explains a lot. Five years after Matthew was born, his father became the headmaster of Rugby School, and from there he proceeded straight into British mythology. He was the heroically terrifying instiller of virtue in "Tom Brown's Schooldays," the most celebrated of all novels about life in an English public—that is, private—school, and he was unceremoniously struck from that pedestal by Lytton Strachey, in "Eminent Victorians," the most poisonous of all English biographies. All the clichés that have, fairly or otherwise, clustered around Victorian life—manliness, emotional clampdown, suppression of unrighteousness both in one's own heart and on the borders of Empire, an unstated but nagging conviction that God must be an Englishman—seem to have cohered in the person of Dr. Arnold. He stoutly believed that children were not valuable souls in their own right but half-formed adults who needed to be molded (and, occasionally, whacked) into shape. Sin was not only original; it was the raw stuff that raged within a boy until he came to Rugby, whereupon it came face to face with the head of that establishment and, after a brief struggle, took early retirement.

And that was Matthew's father. As Ian Hamilton puts it, with his customary dryness, "School holidays could never quite be holidays from school." The educational gene was rampant in the Arnold clan (four of Thomas's sons, Matthew included, would at some time be involved with teaching), and by the age of five Matthew was learning French, Latin grammar, math, history, and geography, and taking a yeasty extract of Scripture every day. One year later, he moved on to Greek, German, and Italian, and by the age of ten the boy was really motoring: "I used to construe only Homer and Xenophon, but I have lately been put into Aeschylus." This may raise eyebrows among our young scholars of today, some of whom arrive at college barely able to inscribe the words "Homer Says D'oh" on their own T-shirts, but it would be wrong to imagine that Matthew felt constrained, let alone persecuted, by the pressure of knowledge. The Victorians did not so much frighten as flatter their offspring with the assumption that junior brains will gather up almost anything that you care to cast at them. If anything, these early harvests were precisely what allowed Arnold to sow his enthusiasms so fruitfully later on; no one, least of all the author himself, has ever been able to decide what he means by the word "culture," but, if it is what the world requires in the effort to become civilized, then culture can perhaps be interpreted most safely as "What I learned at school." Or, more succinctly, "Me and my dad." What Thomas had in mind for Matthew, Matthew wanted for mankind.

He went to Rugby, of course, and from there to Balliol College, Oxford, which, being surpassingly dank, was the fungal breeding ground from which the mid-nineteenth-century British establishment—religious, literary, and administrative—would grow and spread. In the college debating society alone there were two embryonic archbishops, a future Lord Chief Justice, and a couple of substantial poets—Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough. Arnold himself won the Newdigate Prize (later victors would include Oscar Wilde), for a long and strenuous poem about Cromwell, and he deepened his friendship with Clough, whom he had known at Rugby and for whom—more than for Arnold—great things were foretold. "Eight years without a Fault" was Dr. Arnold's daunting verdict on Clough's time at school; in the event, both he and Arnold ended up with second-class degrees, which, by their standards, was like being caught cross-dressing or feasting on human flesh. Thomas Arnold had died of heart failure two years before; it was probably a mercy that he did not live to hear of his son's exam performance.

Still, Arnold secured a fellowship at Oriel College, and then, in 1847, what sounds like a dream job: private secretary to Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, Third Marquis of Lansdowne and full-time political fixer. In practice, this gave him time to write poetry, cultivate connections, travel through Europe, and sit staring out the window of his sumptuous offices in Berkeley Square. No one of Arnold's temperament would expect such a pleasant interlude to last (the whole point of pleasure, indeed, was to provide sustenance for rueful recollection in later life), and in 1851 he turned serious with a vengeance, marrying a pious Tory named Frances Lucy Wightman and becoming, through Lansdowne's instigation, an Inspector of

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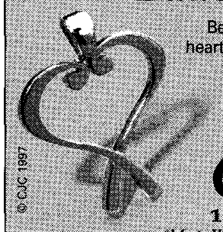

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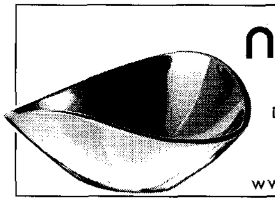

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Schools—a position that he would hold for the next thirty-five years. During that period, while fulfilling his professional duties with diligence and even passion, he would swell into his most enduring role, that of public moralist; Matthew's essays and lectures, with their varying recipes for the creation of a staunch yet refined Christian society, would at last turn him into a son who was worthy of his father. And the poems would dry up.

IT is the damming of inspiration that interests Ian Hamilton. In his short and punchy book, which pretty much ends with Arnold in his mid-forties, Hamilton sets out to discover why the muse was sent packing. One of the more convincing answers is that she was not quite a lady—not the sort of influence who could be relied upon to say the right thing in polite society. Arnold had inherited an obligation to flex his mental muscles for the sake of the common good, and here he was writing stuff like this:

> He hears nothing but the cry of the
> torrents,
> And the beating of his own heart.
> The air is thin, the veins swell,
> The temples tighten and throb there—
> Air! air!

He sounds like a man who can't wait to get out of the drawing room. That extract comes from "Empedocles on Etna," a lengthy formal complaint against the burden of existence. Arnold published the poem in 1852; what his young bride, after barely a year of marriage, made of his "ineffable longing for the life of life / Baffled for ever" is anyone's guess. A year later, in a new edition, he withdrew the poem, arguing that, although Empedocles represented an intriguing philosophical novelty—"the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced... we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of Hamlet and of Faust"—such tangled morbidity was not healthy. It was not *useful.* Who could conceivably derive profit or enjoyment, Arnold asked, from a scene "in which the suffering finds no vent in action... in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done"?

Well, Matthew Arnold could, for one. In fact, he had been plucking that

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particular string since he learned what poetry was. My chief delight, as I trawled through Arnold's collected works, was to come upon these lines:

> Land of my earlier, happier days I cannot love thee less,
> Though here I bid adieu for aye to human happiness!

This is feeble stuff, but no matter; the point is that Arnold wrote it when he was *thirteen years old*. To someone steeped in Keats and early Tennyson, melancholy was the obvious mask to wear; what takes Arnold beyond the moodily chic, and closer to the pathological, is that the mask got stuck to his face. He dedicated one of his best early poems to "Fausta," a pseudonym for his sister Jane, and called it "Resignation"; at thirty, he claimed that he was "three parts iced over"; and he published his last masterpiece, "Growing Old," when he was in his mid-forties, with another twenty years or so ahead of him (although his father had, ominously, died at forty-six). All the fears of the intervening decades, all the educated premonitions of mortality, flow tidally into Matthew's most heartsick and most widely anthologized poem, "Dover Beach":

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Those last lines cast something of a shadow over the earlier exhortation; what on earth is the point of being true to one another when love is a lie, or a battleground? The poem, incidentally, is addressed to his wife; Dover is where the Arnolds spent the first few days of their honeymoon. That must have been fun.

The biggest shock in Hamilton's book is the discovery that, for much of the time, Matthew Arnold *was* fun. A disappointed Henry James once said that Tennyson, in person, was not Tennysonian; if so, then Arnold was anything but Arnoldian. In his youth, at least, he was known as something of a fop. "Matt is full of Parisianism," reported Clough with glee, when Arnold returned from a visit to France. The rest of the Arnolds took offense at his waggishness and his refusal to treat anything with due respect; even bearing in mind the extravagant levels of solemnity in his family, this is an astonishing claim. "Matt does not know what it is to work because he so little knows what it is to think," his father wrote, and you can't help thinking that Matthew's later life, which consisted of nothing *but* slog and rumination, was a loyal response to that challenge. Arnold never lost his sting, his talent for principled mockery, and he was by all accounts an adoring and unstuffy father to his own children; but the cloak of adult responsibility fell heavily on his shoulders, and, for no good reason, his image has been handed down to us as an archetype of the Victorian stiff.

Hamilton is clever and biting on the implications of this accelerated gloom—on the Arnold who so seldom smiled for the camera, as if amusement were unbecoming to a man of his character. Hamilton's whole book is smartly summed up in one paragraph of his preface:

> When Arnold got married and became an educationist, he also turned himself into a pedagogic neo-classicist; the age, he said, needed the kind of large-scale, objective, architectonic verse-constructions which he himself, he came to learn, had no real gift for. Or, to put it another way, what the age didn't need were more poems of the kind that Arnold did have a real gift for, and had indeed already written: lyric poems of the self, that Arnold self which, as he came to believe, had or should have had more important things to do than, well, write lyric poems.

This has a satisfying circularity; Hamilton has always relished the process of rotating irony by which life fails to work out. His earlier publications include biographies first of Robert Lowell, who was blessed with an Arnoldian profusion of gifts and an Arnoldian confusion of duties, and then of J. D. Salinger, whose impregnability made it impossible for Hamilton to write the book he had planned. And Hamilton himself writes quiet and sinewy verse. His "Fifty Poems" was published in 1988; this April, in London, Faber will issue an enlarged edi-

BRIEFLY NOTED

FACE-TIME, by Erik Tarloff (Crown; $23). In this breezy comedy of manners, an up-and-coming Presidential speechwriter named Ben Krause finds out that his girlfriend, Gretchen, is sleeping with the Chief Executive. Ben and Gretchen decide to stay together anyway, even as she continues her visits to the Oval Office. The situation has its perks—a promotion for Ben, "Don Giovanni" with the First Couple at the Kennedy Center—but Ben has trouble adhering to his conviction that you have to be able to compartmentalize to work in the White House.

KA, by Roberto Calasso, translated from the Italian by Tim Parks (Knopf; $27.50). Calasso's erudition and his capacity for invention appear to be limitless. To follow "The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony," his book on the Greek myths, he has created a narrative tapestry of Indian lore: the tales of Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu, and the Mahabharata. All is spectacle and delight, and tiny mirrors reflecting human foibles are set into the weave, turning this retelling into the stuff of literature.

DAUGHTER OF THE RIVER, by Hong Ying, translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt (Grove; $24). Hong Ying, an unwanted sixth child, grew up in the slums of Chongqing during the final years of Mao Zedong's regime. When she turned eighteen, she fell in love with her history teacher; his attentions generated a political and sexual awakening that changed her understanding of her family's past. This remarkable account of a childhood spent on the banks of the Yangtze River, which carried both precious food and the corpses of murdered dissenters past the author's tiny house, explores the depths of personal and civil repression with an almost brutal grace.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., edited by Clayborne Carson (Warner; $25). Carson, the editor of King's papers, has pieced together passages from the leader's writings to create an exceptionally successful posthumous autobiography; while his selection deserves credit, King's own shiningly direct language makes the impression. Much of the book deals with dangerous events—death-defying demonstrations, bombings, assaults, and stays in jail—but it also illuminates the intellectual underpinnings of King's courage.

PROBABILITY 1, by Amir D. Aczel (Harcourt Brace; $22). The author describes this brief speculation regarding the likelihood of intelligent life on other planets as a task inherited from the late Carl Sagan. Using a formula first developed to beat the house in seventeenth-century French casinos, Aczel (who wrote "Fermat's Last Theorem") argues that there is a one-hundred-percent mathematical probability that life has evolved elsewhere in the universe. His powers of persuasion owe less to any statistically certain accident, however, than to his skillful presentation of complex ideas.

tion, entitled "Sixty Poems." Ten new poems in eleven years: Arnold would be proud of him.

In the last decade, Arnold has been subject to, if not outright rehabilitation, at least a cheering resurgence. Nicholas Murray's pensive and well-paced "A Life of Matthew Arnold" was published in 1996; more important, the same year saw the arrival of the first volume of "The Letters of Matthew Arnold" (University Press of Virginia). Three of the six projected volumes are now available, edited by the tireless and tactful Cecil Y. Lang, who has already brought order to the correspondence of Swinburne and (with Edgar Shannon) of Tennyson. The task is even heavier with Arnold, whose own disorder—not in his practical circumstances but in the doubts that prowled the fringes of his consciousness—was active from the start. "I am a reed, a very whoreson Bullrush," he wrote to Clough from Rugby. "But to be listless when you should be on Fire: to be full of headaches when you should slap your Thigh: to be rolling Paper Balls when you should be weaving fifty Spirits into one: to be raining when you had been better thundering," and so on; Arnold never actually brings the sentence to a close, and no wonder, for it is increasingly clear that these stirring admonitions are directed less at Clough than at himself. Eight years later, poor Clough is still getting it in the neck, and Arnold's confidence has grown even weaker, dwindling into sad shorthand: "You certainly do not seem to me sufficiently to desire and earnestly strive towards—assured knowledge—activity—happiness."

What emerges from Lang's majestic edition, as from the biographies, is that no accent is stronger, or more strangulated, than that of self-persuasion. We may regret (as Arnold did) the path that he hammered out for himself, but there is no denying his perseverance. At times, it acquires a comic tinge, as in these lines to his late father:

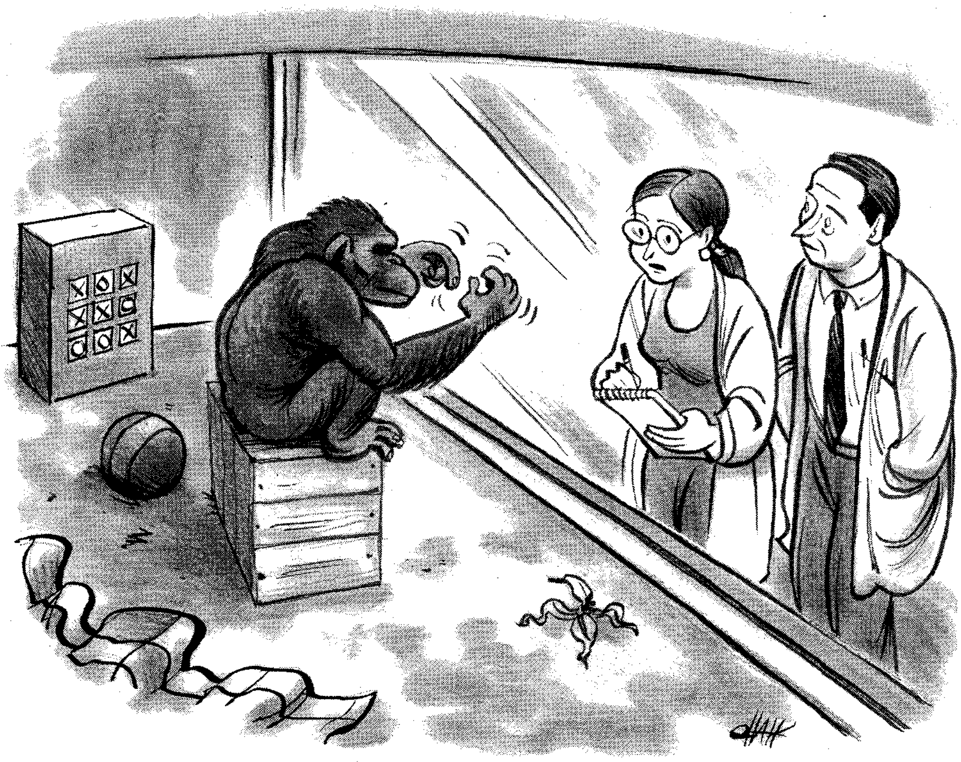
> Languor is not in your heart,
> Weakness is not in your word,
> Weariness not on your brow.
> Ye alight in our van! at your voice,
> Panic, despair, flee away.

Like hell they do. Was there ever a more desperate attempt to crank up one's courage by sheer dint of rhythm? Arnold, whose best poetry grows faint with the elaboration of weariness, tries occasionally to turn verse into a kind of forced march, and the result is a hoot. His natural bent—the gravitational pull of his imagination—is toward the dying fall, and a hard-won, compact repose that no other poet has been able to mimic or match:

> And there arrives a lull in the hot race
> Wherein he doth for ever chase
> That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
> An air of coolness plays upon his face,
> And an unwonted calm pervades his
>   breast.
> And then he thinks he knows
> The hills where his life rose,
> And the sea where it goes.

That last diminuendo breaks your heart, and it partly answers the charge of J. A. Froude, the biographer of Carlyle, that Arnold "only knows the shady side of nature out of books. . . . I don't see what business he has to parade his calmness and lecture us on resignation when he has never known what a storm is." It is a fair point, but there are times when the calm is so tenderly drawn that, against our better judgment, we start to believe in the storm.

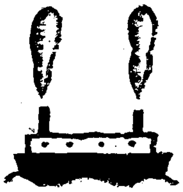
It is chastening to read Arnold and to think of what was being read and written on the other side of the English Channel, let alone of the Atlantic, during his lifetime. He was born a year after Baudelaire, and the majority of his verse was published in the same decade—the eighteen-fifties—as "Les Fleurs du Mal," and yet the two poets seem generations apart. What is more, Nicholas Murray makes the point that Arnold compiled his first volume of "Essays in Criticism" in 1864, the same year that Dostoyevsky's "Notes from Underground" came out; both men cultivated a deep suspicion of material prosperity, and both hungered after a spiritual cure for that condition, but you tremble to think of them together in the same room. It is not a question of the debt-ridden gambler versus the Schools Inspector but of the modern anatomist, unafraid of desire and depravity, standing beside the upholder of classical values, which were even then wilting in his hands. Arnold wrote in some agony of "the hot prison of the present," yet he didn't really dare to break the lock or file through the bars. It would have taken only a small leap of faith, or of honest faithlessness, for him to realize that the raptures of uncertainty



"He says he wants a lawyer."

might be no longer a source of embarrassment but the deserving object of one's analysis, and that civilization, from here on, would not be open to elegant solutions, let alone salvation, but instead would be defined by its discontents. If Arnold looked, however, he never leaped.

THAT caution makes it hard for us, these days, to approach Arnold for instruction. He offers succor and sorrow in equal measure, but the strictures that were developed and propagated in the second half of his life feel more stubbornly rooted in Victorian ground. In the nineteen-eighties, there was a move to coöpt Arnold into the culture wars: in 1994, Yale summarized this debate by issuing a new edition of "Culture and Anarchy," with essays by Gerald Graff, Steven Marcus, Maurice Cowling, and Samuel Lipman—in other words, from right and left. Unexpectedly, there was a kind of sneaky joy in the book, as the reader watched Arnold wriggle around and slip free of all attempts to pin him down. He was raised as a Christian, for example, and he remained a churchgoer, but he once defined God as "the stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfill the law of their being," which sounds to me like the beginnings of Belief Lite. He appeals to the right because of his Parnassian standards of learning and his reflex indignation at mob rule—at the thought of democracy running amok. On the other hand, he said that "the men of culture are the true apostles of equality," and his impatience with the aristocratic ideal grates rudely on reactionary ears. He appeals to the left because—like Voltaire, whom he admired—he scorns the humbug and harshness of religious ideologues, and turns up his nose at the stink of high capitalism. He even favors an *increase* in state intervention. On the other hand, he defines culture as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world," which sounds like bad news for media studies and good news for red-blooded defenders of the canon. Basically, the guy is too quick for us.



Gerald Graff, a professor of English at the University of Chicago, takes Arnold to task on many counts. "Using ritualistically repeated slogans to conceal contradictions" is one of the more incisive; but Arnold was never a philosopher, nor did he claim to be, and Graff's words are a helpful reminder that "Culture and Anarchy," "Literature and Dogma," "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," and the other daunting titles on the Arnold shelf were written by a poet—an ex-poet, perhaps, but not a failed one. "Dover Beach," "Empedocles on Etna," and "The Scholar-Gipsy" are also full of contradictions and ritual repetitions, but that is a source of their incantatory strength. When Arnold urges the citizens of England, as he does on innumerable occasions, to aim for "sweetness and light" as a salve for social ills, it sounds touchingly impractical; one would have liked to see him venture into the East End of London on a smog-bound Saturday night and ask for more of the same. If "Culture and Anarchy" holds up, however, it is not as a political manifesto but as a long-range prose poem—the nimble effusion of a noble mind.

I do not quite buy Hamilton's argument that Arnold deliberately closed the poetic chapter of his life, and imprisoned—or sacrificed—his gift for the sake of work and family, and for the stolidness of prose. The transformations of his career feel not timid but fiercely true to the difficulties of being intelligent, industrious, and therefore thoroughly perplexed in the depths of the last century. "Fret not yourself to make my poems square in all their parts, but like what you can my darling," he wrote to his sister Jane. "The true reason why parts suit you while others do not is that my poems are fragments i.e. that I am fragments, while you are a whole.... Such a person stands firmly and knows what he is about while the poems stagger weakly & are at their wits end." He added, "I shall do better some day I hope." Both the hope and the staggering, the sweet culture and the sweat of anarchy, are what we should value in Arnold, now more than ever. If he was fragments, what does that make us? ♦

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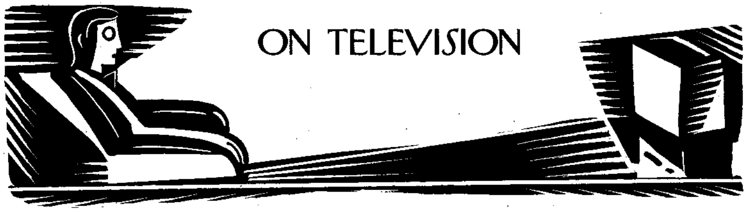
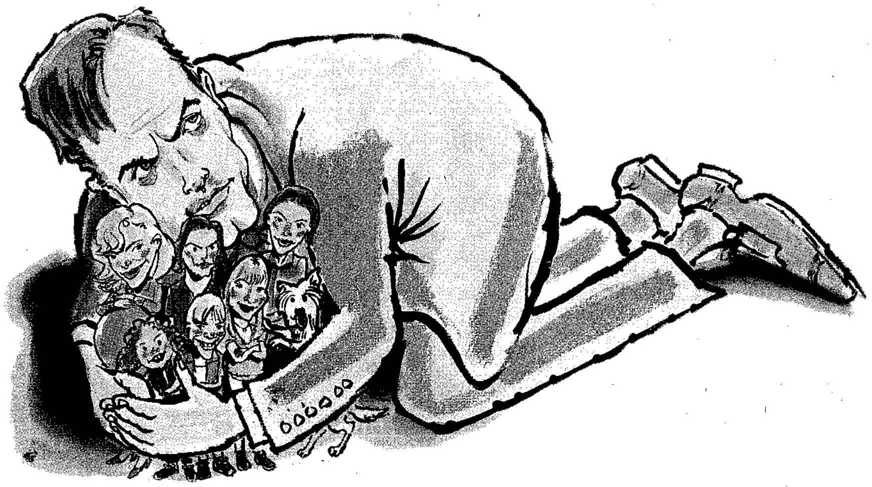


HEAVEN ON EARTH

A family-values show that's hard to turn off.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

WATCHING the WB drama "7th Heaven," which is now in its third season, you can't help noticing that the show, even if you don't like it, is very good at what it does. It's a family-values delivery system so efficient that it can nose right through your force field of sophistication and hit a place in you that you may have believed was defunct: your childhood fantasy factory, where you processed the unreal families you watched on TV every week and then manufactured the very real, often unfair, and always shameful thought "I wish my family were more like this one." That's the trick—the skill—of "7th Heaven": while every episode makes us well aware that the two parents and the five children who constitute the Camdens are not the perfect family, the show nonetheless makes us feel that they are the ideal family. In a way, the fact that such families are found only on TV reinforces the sense that the Camdens are "real": the more "7th Heaven" echoes the fictions of the shows we saw when we were younger, the more true to life it seems.



Stephen Collins, as Eric Camden, with his compelling brood. The more "7th Heaven" echoes the fictions of our TV childhood, the more true to life it seems.

The ethos of "7th Heaven" is both traditional and up-to-date—a redundancy, almost, since traditional values are so *in* right now—and it seems to have been crafted as a response to the weariness a lot of people feel about the pace and the content of contemporary life, or at least of contemporary television. It's "TV Unplugged": both the actual music in the show and the feel of the show are acoustic and folky rather than electric. (A *Time* writer characterized it in a 1997 article as "cruelly slow-paced.") What's funny about "7th Heaven" 's granolatude is that it comes from the mills of Aaron Spelling—the very man who contributed so much to our jadedness.

Eric Camden (the pleasant TV perennial Stephen Collins) is a minister of a nondenominational church in a small California town called Glenoak. I list him first because that's probably the way Annie Camden, his wife (Catherine Hicks), would want it: they are partners in their marriage, but it is a given that Eric is first among equals, just as much because he is the man of the house as because he is a man of God.

An East Harlem Tale

Mrs. C. is not a photographer's model. She is a flesh-and-blood grandmother raising two grandchildren. Her dreams for these children

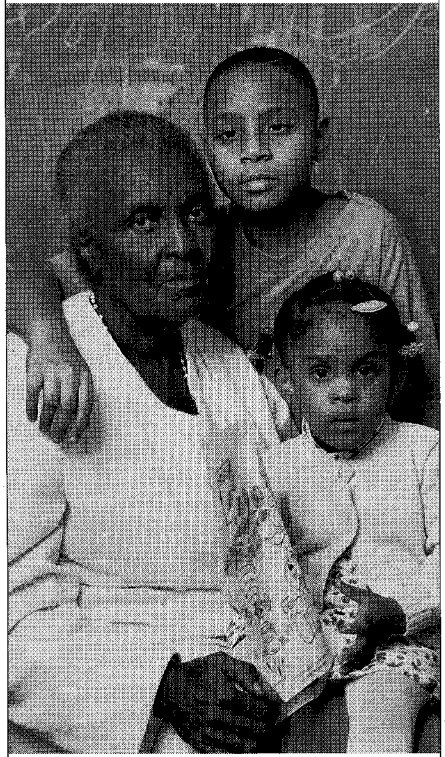


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PHOTO: DAVID LEE

Annie is a "stay-at-home mom" (a ghastly, no-win term—it sounds combative and defensive when used by someone who is one, and patronizing and reductive when used by someone who isn't) who spends a lot of time in the kitchen. That's not just me saying that—even her kids have made the observation that she seems to be baking all the time. Annie and Eric's marriage, we are left in no doubt, is a "real" one—you know, in the romance department. The children, who range in age (by now) from seven to eighteen, have the classic, "normal" problems that kids their ages have. Their roles seem like assignments whose purpose is to illustrate those problems, and their characters are foot soldiers drafted to serve in the war for understanding between parents and children. In the Camden family, though, the battles are not essentially battles of will, and force is used judiciously by the parents. This is instead a War for Greater Understanding. One child has still to fully enter the fray: Ruthie (Mackenzie Rosman), the youngest, has been endowed with freakish, cute-TV-child verbal skills, and she comments on the action with phony cleverness and implausibly snappy truthtelling. Giving her father the latest gossip report on the family—her parents rely on her for updates on the other kids' whereabouts and activities, and Eric often has the same quizzical "Now, where did I put my pipe?" look on his face that Fred MacMurray did in "My Three Sons"—she says, "Check back with me. Stuff happens." Ruthie serves as the family's U.S.O. girl, reminding them, in all her stagy innocence, what they are fighting for.

"7th Heaven" 's unquestioned patriotism about family life is so thoroughgoing that it nearly overcomes any qualms you may have about the very concept of family. It also quickly neutralized my initial shock over the fact that the show doesn't examine the number of children as a subject of interest in itself. (Can it be that Manhattan is the only place in the country where, for a variety of reasons, having five children is almost unthinkable?) The show said all it has to say on that subject when, last season, Annie became pregnant again, and this time with twins. (She's ready to pop, and is due to deliver on the February 8th episode.) Part of me doesn't know what to think about people who already have five children and then go for another one—and the part of me that has bought into the show simply says, Well, this'll be interesting!

"7th Heaven" is by design a show that a family can watch together, although I think that children probably feel freer to enjoy it if they watch it without parental company. (For one thing, the frequent lovey-dovey moments between Eric and Annie could cause an embarrassment meltdown if they were viewed while parents were in the room.) An eleven-year-old I know who watches the show—usually in his own room—said to me that it makes him actually look at his parents and admire them for the way they solve problems. And the show, of course, is about solving probems. Eric, as a minister, does that for a living, but "7th Heaven" doesn't hit you over the head with religion. It's not about miracles and destiny and the idea that "everything happens for a reason." (It's not "Punched by an Angel.") God and religion are the family's foundation, and the story lines often shake the foundation in order to prove how strong it is. The Camdens are, in a sense, a white-bread family, but the show implies that there really is no such thing anymore—that no one is completely safe or completely insulated from the world. Eric has been shot; a friend of the second-oldest girl, Lucy, has died, and another one has been revealed to be a "cutter"; Mary, the oldest girl, has been run over (she's fine now); a friend of Simon (the youngest boy, and also bordering on the too darn cute) is beaten by his father; Eric's sister is an alcoholic; Matt (the firstborn and, as a male teen-ager, the one with the heaviest lesson load when it comes to the big topics of freedom and responsibility) almost died at birth because of an incompetent doctor. In "7th Heaven," the outside world is the problem, not the family; the family is a sweet little shop on Main Street, and the world is the mall that's forcing it out of business.

The Camdens function like a self-cleaning oven—everyone does his part to keep things running smoothly. Simon teaches Ruthie how to do laundry; Matt picks the younger kids up from school. They all make mistakes,

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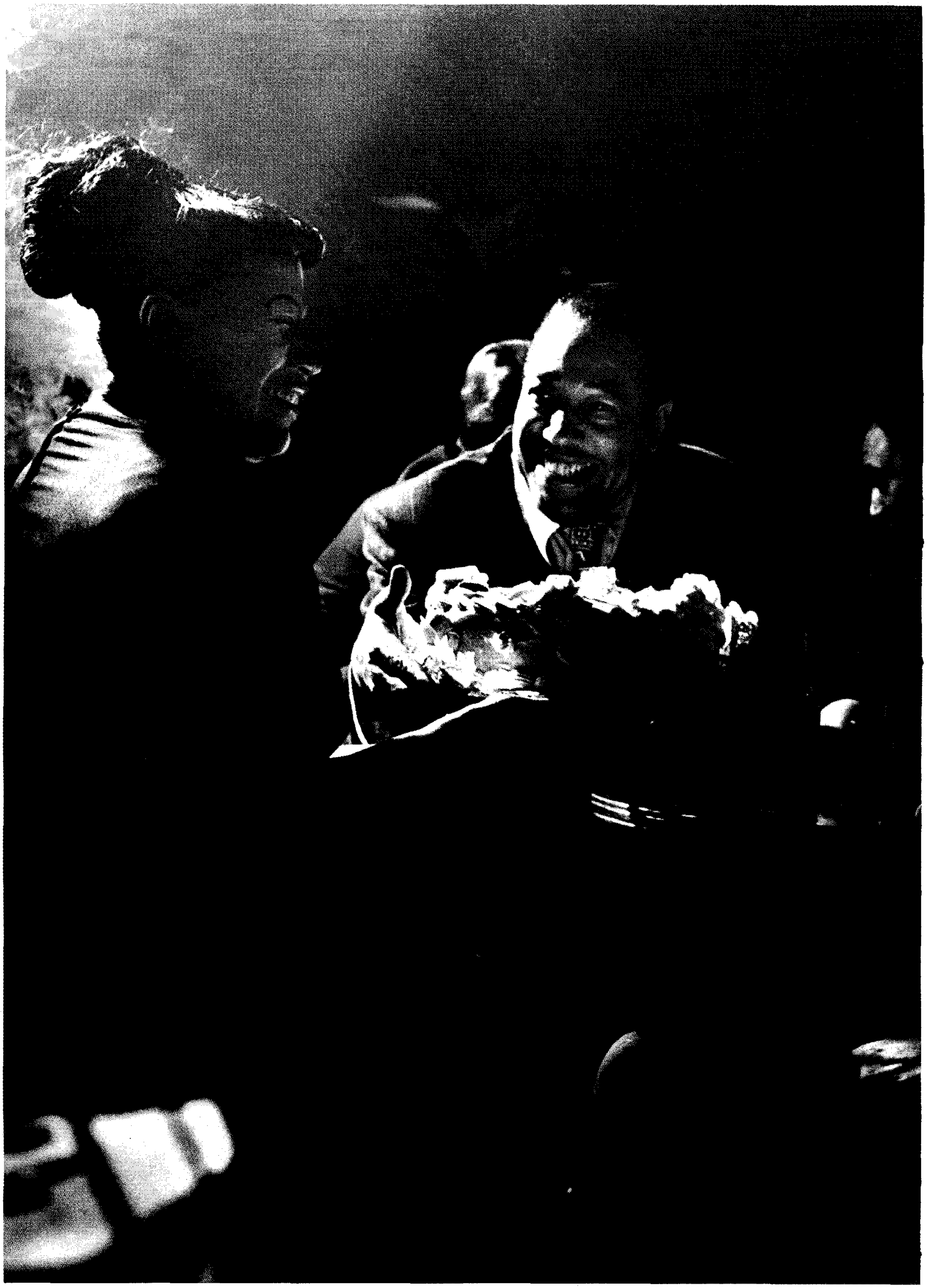


but they admit them, and the parents admit them not just to themselves or to each other but to their children: after a terrible fight, Eric, with tears in his eyes, says to Matt, "Come home, Matt. We'll talk. And this time I'll listen." And the children are coöperative beyond a parent's wildest dreams. The pilot episode of the show begins with a shot of Annie and Eric in bed in the morning. I know what you're thinking, but forget it: one by one, in ascending order, the kids come in and get into bed with their parents. Matt comes in and says to his siblings, "Guys, it's Saturday—the day Mom and Dad sleep late." Dutifully, and happily, they all troop out. This *could* happen in real life, but it never does; the secret of the show's success, neatly established in this very first scene of the series, is an equation between wishful thinking and wish fulfillment. (Appropriately, the Camdens' dog, who is called Happy, is played by a dog called Happy.) And just as children may wonder why their family isn't more like the Cleavers or the Bradys or the Nelsons, adults may watch "7th Heaven" and wonder, Where did we go wrong? Why aren't our children more like those children?

"7th Heaven" raises a lot of "issues"—sex, drugs, violence, racism—but it doesn't raise a lot of questions. In an episode last season, Eric found a joint in the house, and the ensuing crisis prompts Annie to reveal to him a secret from her past. "I did a little experimenting myself," she says. "I want you to know that I've smoked pot." Eric and Annie grew up in the sixties, but he is horrified by her revelation, and feels betrayed. Strings rise in the background as she prepares to confess—the fact that a woman in her forties smoked pot as a teen-ager is presented as *drama*. Eric stares, speechless, at her. A little later, after dinner, he says, "How could you drop a bomb on me like that and then serve eight people, and a dog, a meat loaf like nothing happened?" This scenario is so absurd as to amount to a kind of tabloid surrealism: "CLUELESS MAN IN POTLESS WORLD." But even at such moments "7th Heaven" can get to you, and you may feel loyal to it without knowing exactly why. In a way, the show is like a member of your own family; it knows just how to push your buttons. ♦

SHOWCASE

MOOD ELLINGTON

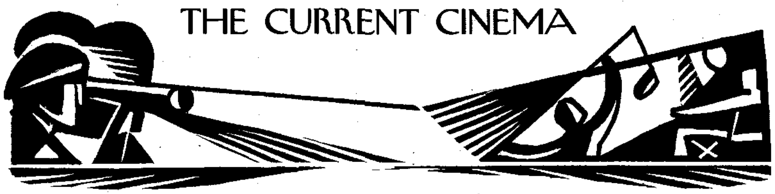
Duke Ellington created a new music, centered on jazz rhythms and constructed of undreamed-of instrumental harmonies and timbral effects, a music tinged by improvisation and underpinned by the blues, sometimes heavily masked. It is joyous, serene, and swinging, wrapped in humor and lyricism and distilled from everything the elegant, gifted composer saw and heard as he worked his way through life. But Ellington never worked alone. He and his band were a unique continuum: he wrote for them and they played for him. (Hearing them in the flesh became one of the ennobling musical experiences of the twentieth century.) Despite the huge expense, he kept the band intact for fifty years, because it allowed him to hear, almost immediately, every new piece that he wrote—his way of satisfying an insatiable artistic ego.

New York has begun celebrating the Ellington centennial. At Carnegie Hall, the conducter Maurice Peress took the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band through a stirring reading of the composer's forty-five-minute "Black, Brown and Beige," a pioneering piece that reveals new secrets each time you hear it. Uptown, at the 92nd Street Y, the pianist Dick Hyman, the Mitchell-Ruff Duo, and the great lyrical trumpeter Joe Wilder eased their graceful ways through twenty Ellington songs. Meanwhile, a reunion of surviving Ellington hands and a recital by the wonderfully eccentric pianist Roland Hanna launched Jazz at Lincoln Center's yearlong celebration, which will include, among some three dozen events, a collaboration between the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic, to explore Ellington's luscious reworkings of Grieg.

Centennial celebrations are composed largely of memory and imagination—re-creations of the vanished past. But when you return from the concert hall, put on Ellington's own recordings of what you have just heard, and there he will be. —Whitney Balliett

Photograph by Herman Leonard

THE CURRENT CINEMA



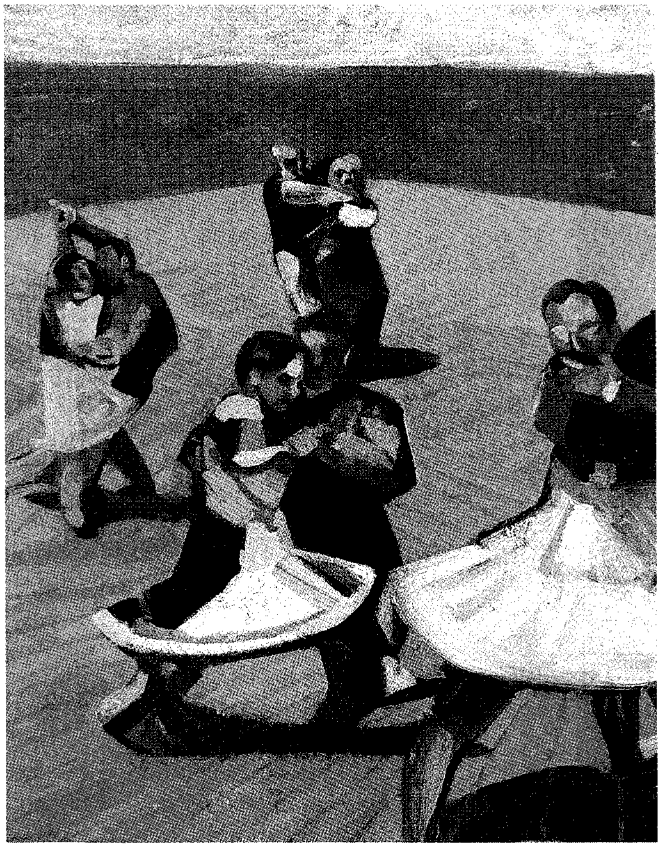
HAPPY TOGETHER

Lovers in Los Angeles; drinkers in Glasgow.

BY ANTHONY LANE

THERE is no plot in "Playing by Heart." Instead, we get a tray of mini-plots; it's the cinematic answer to one of those parties where you pig out on canapés. From the top, we have Paul (Sean Connery) and Hannah (Gena Rowlands), who have been married for forty years, and Joan (Angelina Jolie) and Keenan (Ryan Phillippe), who meet in a club and take it from there. Next comes Hugh (Dennis Quaid), who stalks around telling strangers the catastrophic story of his life; needless to say, the story is different every time. The hot spot goes to Gracie (Madeleine Stowe) and Roger (Anthony Edwards), who put in long hours in hotel rooms, betraying their respective spouses. Lastly, there is Mark (Jay Mohr), who is succumbing to AIDS in the arms of his adoring mother (Ellen Burstyn), and the no less despairing Meredith, who can't get it on with men. This is mainly because she is played by Gillian Anderson: we are so locked into the "No sex, please, I'm sexy" look that Anderson has perfected in the course of "The X-Files" that, when Meredith *does* meet a nice guy—an architect named Trent (Jon Stewart)—and kisses him without any side effects, the moment seems almost libellous.

The film was written and directed by Willard Carroll, and you can see why he landed such a hefty cast. The script is bait, full of those tasty lines that actors like to get their teeth into. "Talking about love is like dancing about architecture," Joan says in the opening monologue. If anything, this is a little *too* tasty: it feels more written than spoken, and it retains the faint tang of the writer's pleasure in his own coinage. You can tell that Carroll was happy with it, because Joan gets to repeat the same speech later in the movie—whose original title happened to be, yes, "Dancing About Architecture." The bravest aspect of the film is that Carroll so openly flouts the ruling that Joan lays down. *Everyone* in this picture talks about love, or the lack of it, pretty much all the time. I never thought I would see the day when Sean Connery uttered the line "My love for somebody else made me love you more."



Everyone talks about love, or the lack of it, all through "Playing by Heart."

Gena Rowlands has the good sense to scoff at this stuff; like her character, Hannah, she's been around long enough to know the seamy odor of male self-justification when she smells it. It's fun to watch these two performers gently knock each other about; the script digs up a bone of contention—something about an old fling of Paul's, twenty-five years ago—and tries to interest us in Hannah's distress at discovering it, but in truth the bickering between husband and wife is as comfy as the throws and cushions that grace their firelit home, or the delicious harmonic massage of John Barry's score. (Shades of Bond movies past: at one point, Connery even wears a tux.) Their squabbles are on a par with Meredith's fear of commitment, or Roger's pangs of conscience; the movie would like us to take them seriously, but at the same time Carroll makes sure to add a little lip gloss to every scene—to brighten it up a touch. The result is that, even as we are pulled into this bundle of tales, we don't really care how they turn out.

In other words, "Playing by Heart" is like an upbeat Robert Altman production—a curious beast indeed. We have grown so accustomed to Altman's mosaic way with narrative that we barely question his pessimism; it seems only natural that, under the pressure of social frustration, the tiles will craze and crack. But here comes Carroll with a picture that could be a deliberate challenge to "Short Cuts," a rebuke to its taste for apocalypse. "Playing by Heart," too, is set in Los Angeles, but Vilmos Zsigmond's cinematography ravishes the city and dispels its confounding smog; no one could have cause to riot in such a place, and even Joan, an out-of-work actress, can afford a cool apartment, with a bedroom almost Roman in its opulence. There she lies with a lover, who himself is under viral sentence of death; but the AIDS that kills one character in this movie appears to offer no obstacle to the erotic satisfactions of another. I like hopeful movies as much as the next guy, but this is ridiculous.

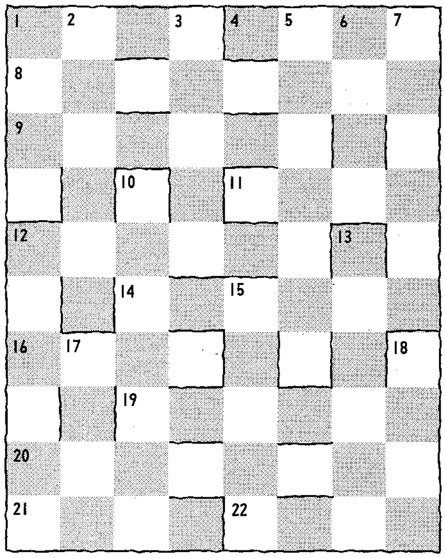
As the picture warms to a close, all the disparate stories come together. We suddenly realize how they are linked, or, at any rate, we politely feign surprise at the really quite obvious connection. "Dear Journalist," says a memorandum in the publicity notes. "We ask that when writing or talking about 'Playing by Heart' you help us to keep the mystery of the film intact." What the hell are we watching here? "The Mousetrap"? The only mystery of the film, in fact, concerns the tactics by which a distinguished cast is comprehensively outwitted by a single novice. There is immense skill on show, especially from the women: Ellen Burstyn is all kindly stoicism and, as usual, you can't stop gazing at Madeleine Stowe's gaze, with its slightly scary darkness, and wondering what she wants from life—what, despite that gracious smile, could possibly meet her unfathomable needs. In the end, however, it is Angelina Jolie, the baby of the pack, who walks away with the movie. Jolie is the daughter of Jon Voight, and it's startling to see the return of those cherub-in-peril looks that spelled such trouble in "Midnight Cowboy." But Jolie's Joan is no victim: her prettiness is that of the cartoon sexpot—eyes, mouth, and bosom all at least one size too big for her frame—and she uses it to the full, like a clown with yard-long shoes. What is more, she drinks like a camel and talks at triple speed, yakking away in the face of the dumbfounded Keenan, who has sky-blue hair and nothing to say for himself. In short, she has little truck with the refined notion of a writer's movie; she rattles off Carroll's careful words as if they were nothing but blah, and she restores our trashy faith in movies as an overload of sensation. Jolie doesn't play by heart: she plays by the skin of her teeth, and by the seat of her pants, and she dines off vodka Martinis. In a film that believes in the city of angels, a little devil is always welcome.

THE new Ken Loach picture, "My Name Is Joe," is like any other Ken Loach picture, only more so. Its central figure is a reformed Glaswegian alcoholic named Joe (Peter Mullan), and its harshest intimation is that life as a reformed Glaswegian alcoholic—no fixed employment, bare accommodation, men with square heads who will snap your legs if you break a promise—contains more than enough to turn you back into a practicing Glaswegian alcoholic. The turning point comes when Joe commits the elementary error of falling in love: he meets a health worker called Sarah (Louise Goodall), wallpapers her apartment, takes her bowling, and sleeps with her—all without touching a drop. As he points out, he can hardly "ask her down the pub for fifteen pints of Diet Coke." What makes the film so wounding is that Joe's emotional decency is also the cause of his descent; faced with helping his nephew, who has a junkie wife and a heap of debt, Joe runs an errand for a drug dealer and betrays Sarah's trust. So much for happiness.

Loach is one of the last stubborn, infuriated socialists to be making movies—an object of almost archeological fascination in the era not only of James Cameron but of Tony Blair. The Loach approach has often been laughably hectoring, and he retains a touching faith in the working-class capacity for cultural improvement; Joe runs a soccer team *and* listens to Beethoven. The rule seems to be that the more Loach neglects his political obligations and burrows into a single character the more his movies wake up. This was true of "Kes," back in 1969, and it's mostly true of "My Name Is Joe," thanks to Mullan's compact performance—always appealing, with its naughty-boy wisecracks, but too vulnerable to be ingratiating. What stays with you, in fact, is not the doomy hysteria of the climax but the simpler, scuffed pleasures of Joe's existence: laughing at a daft friend of his who carries an ironing board on a bicycle, or watching his soccer players strip off their shirts and run around in their Scottish skins, as pale as dough. For American audiences, "My Name Is Joe" comes with subtitles, although it's unclear whether the intention is to transcribe or translate; "Giro" turns into "check," for instance, yet Joe's cry of "That cunt's from the fucking Social!" is left intact. What he means, by the way, is "Ah, yonder I espy a gentleman from the Department of Social Security, who appears with some justice to be inquiring as to whether, in my capacity as a welfare claimant, I am genuinely unemployed." Or words to that effect. ♦

8 x 10 CRYPTIC

NO. 75 BY FRASER SIMPSON



ACROSS

1 Surrounded by a poorly lit retrospective (4)
4 Piece of glass hurt, by the sound of it (4)
8 Southern woman brought in red rose (8)
9 Dull sort of photograph on the front of large toy company (6)
11 Easily bruised items? For example, skinned nose (4)
12 Strange fellow fixed locks behind dam (6)
14 Boomer hearing church's rules (6)
16 Newspaper publisher Adolph taking away litre of water for the Scotch? (4)
19 Toted a novel so far (2,4)
20 Pastor embraced by devout prior (8)
21 Nimble closing of doors by snoop (4)
22 Teases Rhode Island with nonsense (4)

DOWN

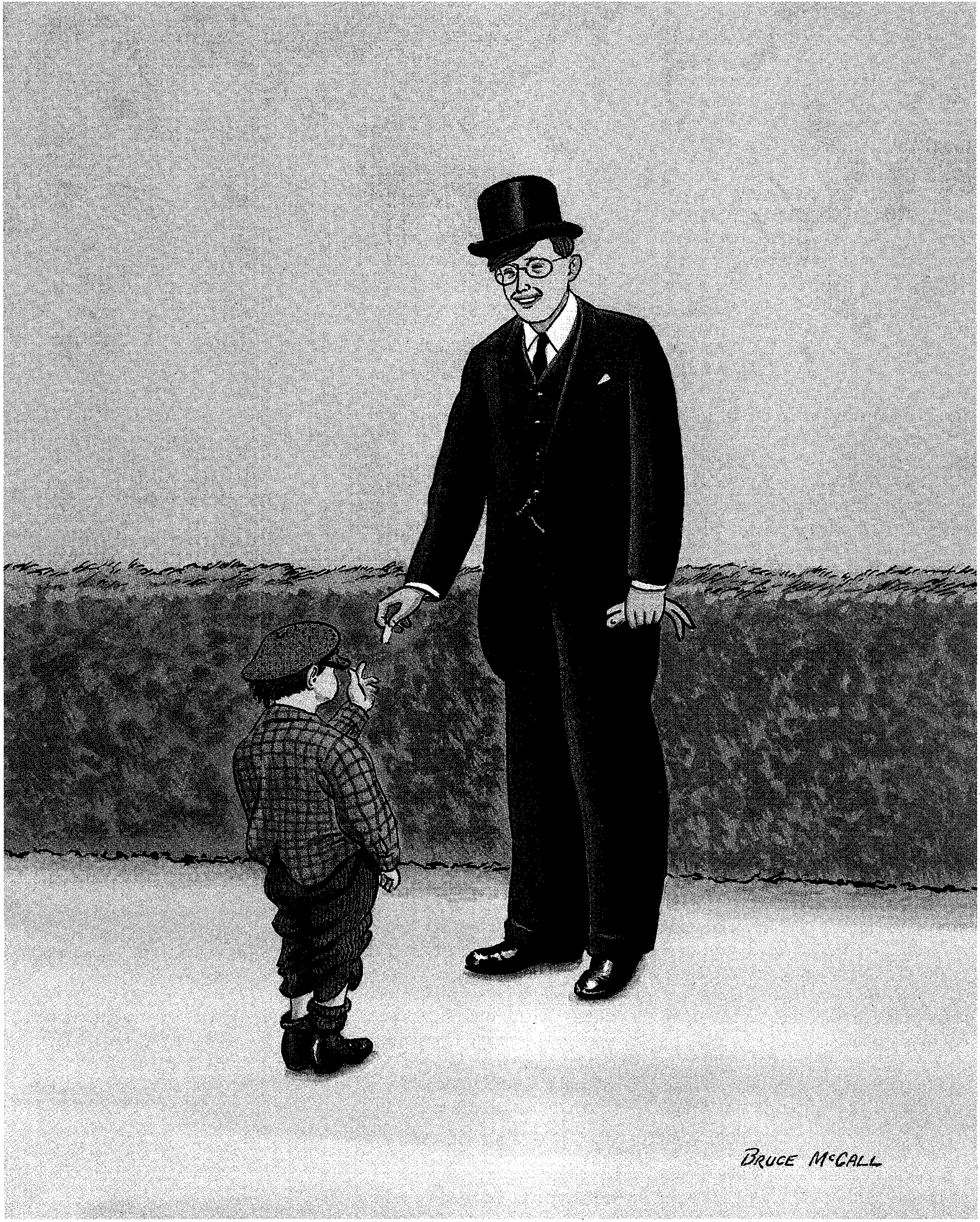
1 Mary cracks up host (4)
2 Thin male ready to participate (6)
3 Don't encourage half of laundry soaps (5)
5 Galleon at sea vanished (3,4)
6 Somewhat insane Roman! (4)
7 Lunatic does in famous inventor (6)
10 Temperature taken by wealthier seismologist (7)
12 My error with rings (6)
13 High button almost turned up Jacuzzi (6)
15 The very bottom drain is ruined (5)
17 Fishmonger's offering crab (4)
18 James Stewart hides soldier's meal (4)

• •

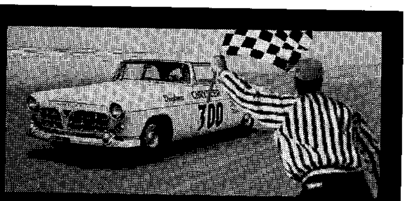
The solution to puzzle No. 74 appears on page 69. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

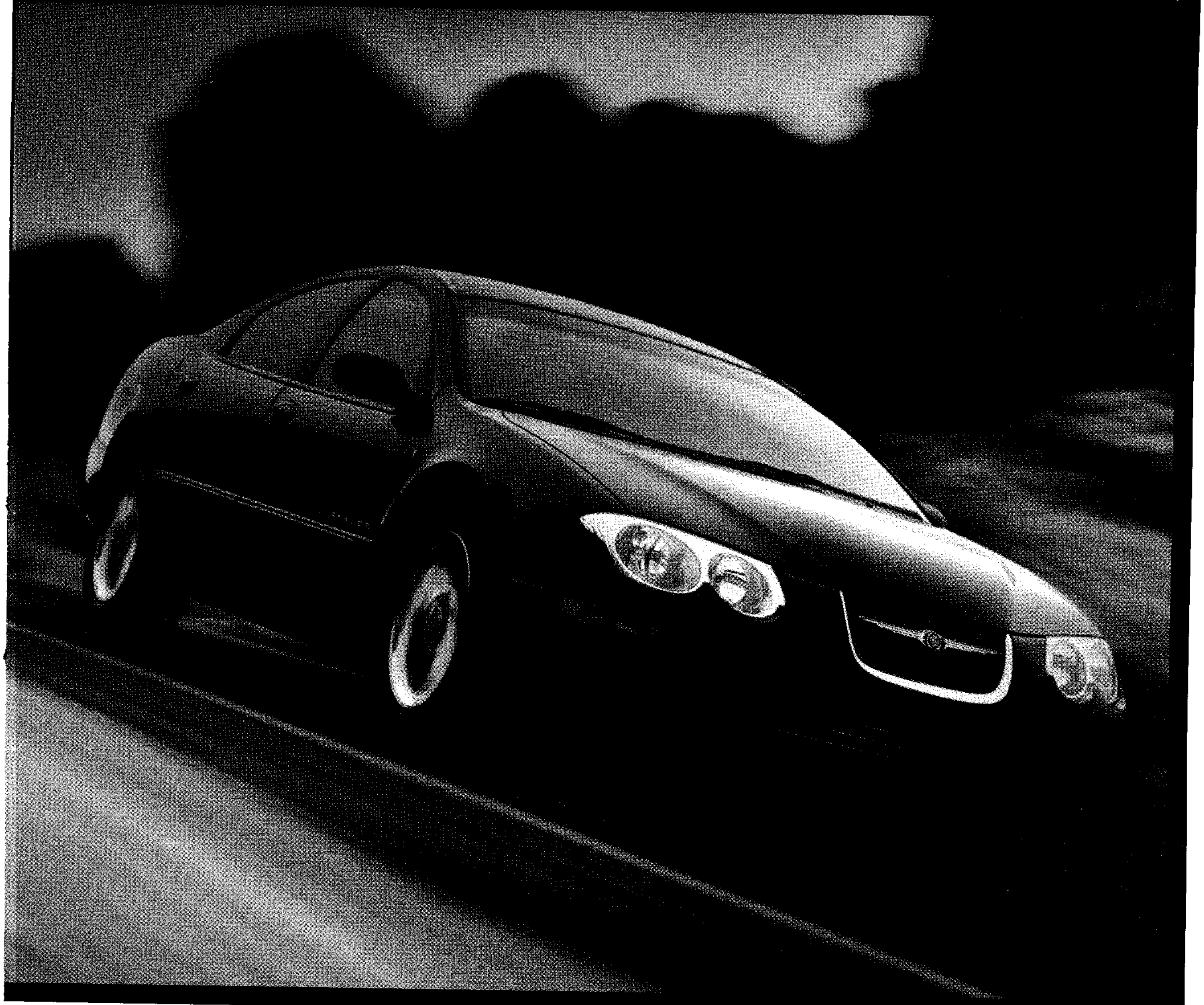
THE BACK PAGE BY BRUCE McCALL

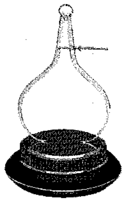
ANNALS OF CHARITY



William H. Gates III initiates his custom of handing out a silicon chip to every deserving urchin he meets.







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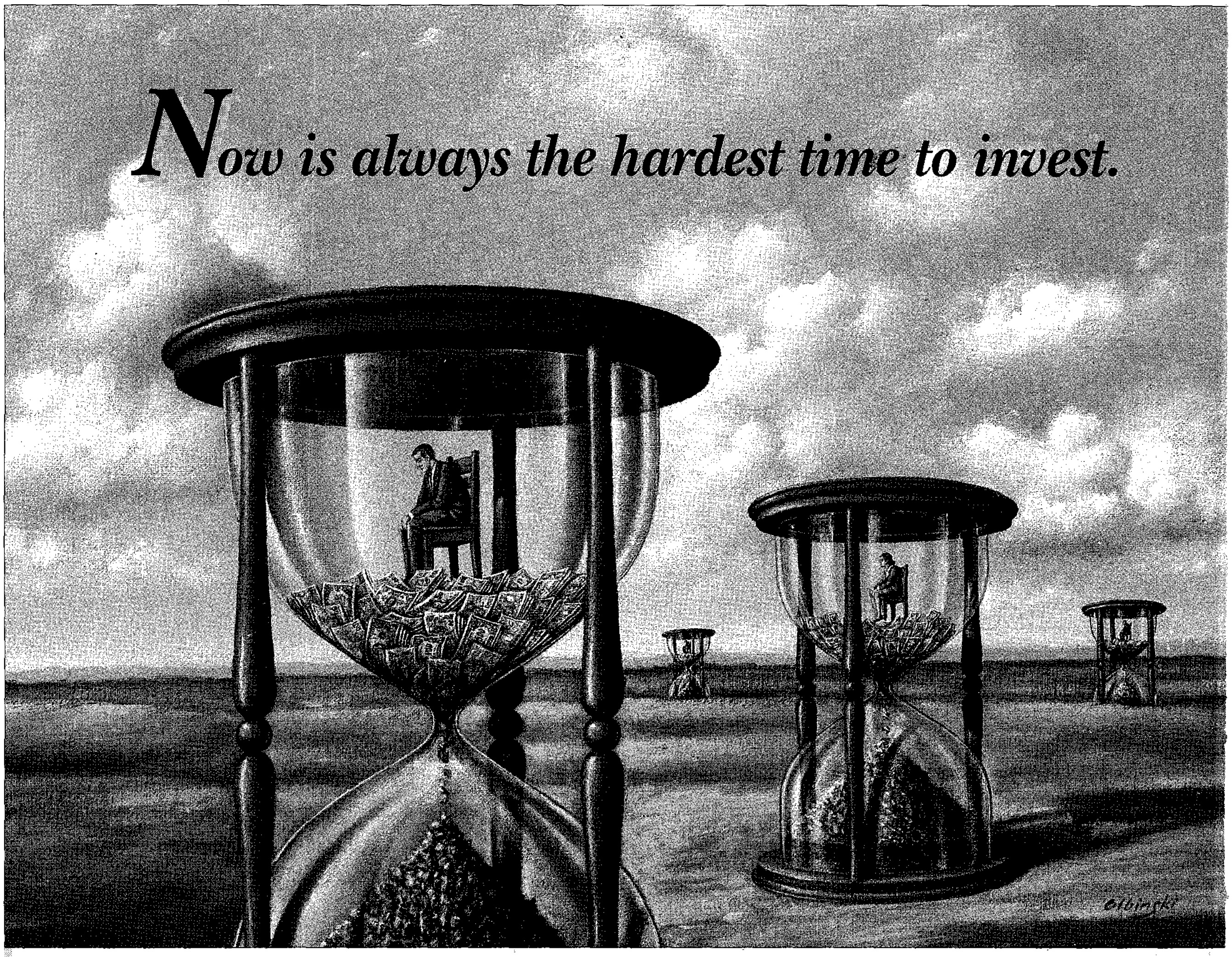
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